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THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH

BY
CHARLES READE



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STORIES RETOLD
THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH





THE PRINCE'S BANQUET

THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH

BY
CHARLES READE

Abridged and Simplified

By
S. G. DUNN, M.A. (Oxon)

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
CHARLES READE

I dedicate this attempt to make his work wider known among those Eastern peoples, whose privilege it is to share with the West the fruits of his genius, in the hope that in the telling I have not tarnished the charm of his immortal story. Of world-wide interest that tale will ever be, for it is founded on the human heart. The conflict between the Cloister and the Hearth is not confined to Europe nor to the Middle Ages; India, too, has had her ascetics seeking in solitude emancipation from the fetters and illusions of this flesh, and her Buddhas who have come back from the forests to find, in unselfish service for their fellow beings, the final peace of full attainment.

S. G. D.

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CHAPTER I

Introductory. Gerard leaves his family and falls in with new friends on the journey.

NOT a day passes over the earth, but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Of these obscure heroes, philosophers, and martyrs, the greater part will never be known to those who come after them; but of others the world's knowledge may be said to sleep; their lives and characters lie hidden in the annals that record them. The words written of them seem so cold, so remote from life, that men do not read them, or, if they read them, do not understand. Here the writer of fiction may be of use to the public—as an interpreter of the lives of those who would else be forgotten. In an old chronicle you may find the story that is set down here, but it is told with such harsh brevity that you would pass it by with scarce a thought. It is the story of a pair who lived four hundred years ago, and yet, if I can but show you what their lives were on this earth, you will be moved to think of them with pity and perhaps yourselves take courage from the tale.

It was past the middle of the fifteenth century, a hundred years before Akbar was ruling in India. Philip was King of Holland, where our tale begins.

Elias and Catherine his wife lived in the little town of Tergou. He traded in cloth and silk and all manner of stuffs for clothing. The couple were free from poverty but not from care; for they had no less than nine children. The birth of each had been hailed with great rejoicings, and when parents and children were all young together, the latter were looked upon as lovely playthings, made for the joy and comfort of their father and mother. But as the children grew up and the parents grew older, and saw how hard it is for folk to find the means of life by work, care mingled with their love. They belonged to a singularly wise and prudent nation: in Holland reckless parents were as rare as disobedient children. So when the huge loaf of bread came in at meal-times, and was soon all

devoured, Elias and Catherine would look at one another and say, 'Who is to find bread for them all when we are dead?'

At this remark the younger children would smile; for in their opinion dinner and supper came like sunrise and sunset, and they could not imagine a time when either would cease to be. But the elder ones pondered on the saying and began to think, some of them good thoughts, some evil thoughts, according to their natures.

By prudence and self-denial Elias and Catherine managed to clothe all the little bodies and feed all the mouths, and yet put aside, week by week, a little money to meet the future.

One day the eldest boy but one, aged nineteen, came to his mother, and begged her to ask his father to let him go to Amsterdam, the largest city of that district, and to place him with a merchant to learn his trade. 'I should like the life,' he said, 'I am good at figures, and merchants become wealthy.'

Catherine threw up her hands with dismay. 'What! leave Tergou?'

'If I can leave the folk of Tergou, surely I shall not mind leaving the houses of it!'

'Will you quit your father?'

'Mother, if I can leave you, I can leave him.'

'Will you leave your brothers and sisters who love you so dearly?'

'There are enough,' said the boy, 'in the house without me. And mother, nothing can make me change my mind. There will be one mouth less for you to feed.'

Then Catherine saw why the boy pretended to wish to go away, and she began to cry. But Richard had a strong will, and at last he was sent to Amsterdam, his face very sad at the departure from his home.

So Richard started his own life in the world, and cost his parents no more money. But all their little store had been spent in buying him needful things for his journey, and they had to begin again with their careful saving, week by week. Two years passed, and his brother Jacob went to join Richard, and Elias and Catherine were very sad as one by one their children left home to take their part in the

world, though it had to be. But there were two still remaining that were unable to work, and two that were unwilling. The unable ones were Giles, a dwarf, ugly and deformed, stupid and sometimes malicious, and little Catherine, a poor little girl who could only move about with the aid of two sticks or crutches, and lived in much pain of body, but always had a smiling face and a kind voice. The unwilling ones were Sybrandt, the youngest an idle scamp, and Cornelis, the eldest, who had made calculations and had come to the conclusion that there was no need for him to go away and work; he would stay at home, and when his father died, inherit all the money he left!

But the poor parents were often in doubt whether they would leave any at all! And then, they asked themselves, who would care for Giles and Catherine? But they had yet another son, and looked to him with hope. This was Gerard, and it is of Gerard that our story mainly tells.

Young Gerard was for many years a son apart, the object of no fears and no great hopes. No fears, for he was to become a priest, and the church in those days always maintained those who served her; no great hopes for they knew no great man who would advance their son through his influence and, besides, they thought Gerard frivolous in his tastes. For he was fond of reading and writing, and these seemed to his simple parents useless pursuits! In them he was not encouraged at home, but in a neighbouring monastery the monks helped him with his penmanship till he became as skilful as themselves. Then the monks said that he ought to paint upon the borders of the books he wrote in, illuminate them, as the phrase was, and Gerard tried that too and took pleasure in drawing and colouring in this way. But he could not afford to buy the colours to make his paints, till it happened that Mistress Margaret Van Eyck came to live in Tergou, and heard of Gerard and his skill. She was interested because her brothers, who were dead, had been famous painters, and she sent for Gerard and encouraged him, and supplied him with all that he needed for this art. So Gerard became very skilful, and was happy, and often made his family laugh with his jests and merry sayings. In

return for all the kindness of the monks, he copied two of their most precious manuscripts, for in those days no printed books existed, and all learning was handed down in written books.

Now it happened that about this time Philip, the Prince of Holland, proclaimed throughout his dominions that he



would give prizes for the best paintings and illuminated and written books that were sent in to his palace by a certain day. He himself could read and write—no small attainments in that age—and he was fond of art and patronized all artists. He liked to see all manner of fine things about him, and sought out the most handsome servants. In fact, every one in his palace was either singularly fair to look upon, or remarkably ugly, since anything out of the common pleased his fancy.

Gerard heard of the prize, and resolved to try for it. His family laughed at him when he told them, all but little Kate, who said, 'Is it because he is our brother you think he cannot be capable?'

His mother was unwilling at first for him to compete; she thought he could not win, and the money needed for materials would be wasted. Then Gerard said he would ask Mistress Van Eyck for materials, and that annoyed his

mother ; she wished no one else to be kinder to her son than herself. So she gave him enough money, and more too, that he might go to the king's palace at the great city of Rotterdam, and see the work of the other competitors and compare that with his own.

The night before he went Margaret Van Eyck asked him, to take a letter for her, and when he looked at it he found, to his surprise, that it was addressed to the Princess Marie, at the palace. So Gerard started for Rotterdam in his holiday suit, a doublet or close fitting shirt of thick grey cloth with sleeves, and a jerkin, or sleeveless coat, over it. From his waist to his heels he was clad in a pair of tight fitting buckskin hose or tight trousers, fastened by laces (called points) to his doublet. His shoes were pointed and secured by a strap that passed under the hollow of the foot.

When he was some distance on his way to Rotterdam he felt tired, but he soon fell in with a pair that were more so. He found an old man sitting by the roadside quite worn out, and a pretty young woman holding his hand with a face full of anxiety. The old man wore a gown and a fur coat and velvet cap, sure signs of dignity ; but the purse hanging at his girdle looked lean, and the fur old and worn, sure signs of poverty. The young woman was dressed in plain brown cloth, and white linen showed at her throat and on her arms, a net of silver cord kept her hair in its place, and very lovely fair hair it was.

Gerard saw that these were good people, but poor and perhaps in trouble, so when he had passed them he reflected and turned back and, coming towards them bashfully, said, 'Father, I fear you are tired.'

'Indeed, my son, I am,' replied the old man, 'and faint for lack of food.'

The girl seemed ashamed at this, for she was unwilling that Gerard should think them so poor. But Gerard did not perceive this, and promptly went to work, and gathered sticks and kindled a little fire. On this he put an iron flask that he had with him, full of soup prepared by his mother for the journey, and leaving the girl to mind the fire, ran off to a cornfield close at hand.

While he was away, an old man rode up on a mule. His coat was new, and he seemed rich and prosperous.

It was Ghysbrecht, the head citizen or burgomaster, as he was called, of Tergou. He was a miser, and looked one. But just now he was elated at the idea of the feast to which he was going at the palace. Yet at the sight of the old man and his daughter by their little fire of sticks he looked pained and uneasy.

‘Why, Peter—Margaret,’ said he almost fiercely, ‘what is this?’

Margaret answered, ‘My father was exhausted so I am warming him something to give him strength before we go on.’

Ghysbrecht seemed sorry and put his hand to his purse; but he fumbled about, afraid lest he might pull out too large a coin, and just at that moment back came Gerard, running up with some straws, and threw himself down by the fire. Ghysbrecht started and glared at him, and took his hand out of his purse. ‘Oh,’ said he bitterly, ‘I am not wanted;’ and went slowly on, looking suspiciously at the group as he turned away.

‘Why,’ said Gerard gaily, ‘I believe the old miser grudges us our soup!’ and at that they all laughed.

Meantime Ghysbrecht plodded on, more wretched in his wealth than these in their poverty. For the curious thing is that at least one half of that wealth belonged not to Ghysbrecht at all, but to the old man and girl who sat by a roadside fire to be fed by a stranger. They did not know this, but Ghysbrecht knew it. And he was partly ashamed of what he had done; and partly afraid they might find out. Twenty years before, the chance of cheating them secretly out of this money had come to him, and he had yielded to the base temptation. It seemed safe then. Perhaps it was safe now. But when he saw Gerard with them, suspicion and fear arose in his heart. ‘Suppose,’ he thought, and shuddered, ‘suppose they find me out!’

CHAPTER 2

Gerard secures an entry for himself and his friends to the Prince's banquet.

'THE soup is hot now,' said Gerard.

'But how are we to get it into our mouths?' inquired the old man, despondingly.

'Father, the young man has brought us straws,' said Margaret, with a smile.

Then Gerard took his cap and lifted off the flask, and with a merry smile gave it to the old man. He tremulously inserted a straw and sucked. And behold! his weary face was seen to brighten till it quite glowed, and as soon as he had drawn a long breath, he began to speak in praise of the soup, which he said was the best restorative a fainting man might find. Then he went on to talk of all the different kinds of soups that had ever been made, and told them the names of learned physicians, of the medical skill of the Greeks and Romans and Arabians and many other peoples, for he was a very learned man and loved to talk when he could find some one to listen to him.

Meanwhile the soup was getting cold!

Margaret interrupted the old man and pointed this fact out to him, and then he continued to suck, and Gerard said how pleased his mother would be that her soup had profited a man of learning. And now, the bread and soup being disposed of, the old scholar prepared to continue his journey.

Gerard found that he could not tie the ribbon that fastened on his hat, and Margaret, after watching his efforts for some time, offered to help him. So she tied the ribbon with her little white and delicate hands, and Gerard thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and gazed at her with such adoration as made her lower her eyes and brought colour to her cheeks.

So the three of them started on again together, and, as Gerard was unacquainted with Rotterdam, Peter, the old man, showed him the way to the street in which the palace stood. Peter and Margaret were going to their cousin's house in another quarter.

When they had gone, Gerard remembered that he had

not asked where they lived or who they were. He reproached himself for being so timid.

'To think I must meet beauty and goodness and learning—three pearls of great price—and never see them more!' he lamented.

As he mused thus he lost his way, but presently meeting a crowd of persons all moving in one direction, he mingled with them, for he supposed they must be making for the palace. But soon the noisy troop with the moody Gerard emerged not at the palace, but upon a large meadow by the side of the river, and then Gerard saw why there was all this crowd. Games of all sorts were going on: wrestling, archery, and juggling delighted the company, and there was also a trained bear who stood on his head and marched upright, and bowed very gravely to his master, and a hare that beat a drum, and a cock that strutted on little stilts. These sights made Gerard laugh now and then, but hearing a young man say to his fellow that the prince had been at the meadow, but was now gone to the palace to entertain the burgomasters and leading citizens and the competitors for the prizes, Gerard thought he too would like to feast with a prince. So he left the river-side and found the right street this time. But when he came to the palace, he was refused admittance, first at one entrance and then at another, till he came to the great door of the courtyard. It was kept by soldiers, and a pompous servant with a gold chain of office round his neck was refusing to let any one in, though many persons surrounded him, trying to enter.

Gerard struggled through the throng and suddenly saw something that made his heart beat. For there were Peter and Margaret talking to the servant and asking to be admitted. Their cousin, they found, had left his house to attend the feast at the palace, and they had come on in the hope of going in and finding him.

But the servant was surly. He would not admit them, nor would he send in a message; he only shouted,

'No strangers enter here but the competitors and their friends.'

The crowd laughed at the old man and girl who could not get into the palace, and Margaret shrank back in confusion, when she felt a touch on the arm, and there was Gerard!

A little cry of joy came from her, for she had been frightened by the crowd.

Gerard gave his name to the porter and told him he was a competitor.

'You may enter,' said the porter.

'With my company, these two?' asked Gerard.

'Nay,' said the porter, 'these are not your company; they came here before you.'

'What matter? they are my friends, and without them I don't go in.'

'Stay outside then.'

'That I will not.'

'We will see.'

'We will, and speedily.' Saying this, Gerard raised a voice of astounding power and shouted so that the whole street rang.

'Ho! Philip, Prince of Holland!'

'Are you mad?' cried the porter.

'Here is one of your varlets who defies you!' cried Gerard.

'Hush! Hush!' pleaded the porter.

'And will not let your guests pass in.'

'Hush!' cried the porter. 'Oh, I'm a dead man! The prince is there.' Then, suddenly trying to overpower Gerard's voice, he shouted, 'Open the gate, ye knaves! Way there for Gerard and his company.'

The gate swung open as by magic, and Gerard and the two marched in, between lines of soldiers who saluted them. The moment they had passed, the gates were closed again and all but squashed a fat citizen that sought to wedge himself in along with Gerard.

A few steps brought them upon a scene of luxury. The courtyard was laid out with tables loaded with rich food, and piled with silver and gold cups and bowls. Guests in rich and various costumes sat beneath a leafy canopy of fresh cut branches fastened to silk cords, golden, silver, and blue, that were hung across; fruits of many hues, and bells of gold and silver peeped from the leaves, and fountains threw jets of wine and perfumes in the air. The prince's musicians played their lutes at intervals. The sun was just setting, and its red rays lit up the glorious spectacle, while Gerard and his friends stood as if spellbound at the

beauty. Presently a whisper buzzed round them, 'Salute the Prince! Salute the Prince!' and looking up they saw the prince, seated high on a dais, bidding them welcome with a kindly wave of the hand. They bowed low, and the duke signed to some servants to attend to their wants.

Soon they were seated at a table, and Gerard was telling them how pleased he was to see them again. Then ready servants brought in dish after dish. There was soup, and fish in I don't know how many forms, and all kinds of wonderful food. Fruits and cakes were followed by some marvellous sweets; there were castles of sugar; elephants and camels, knights on horses, and trumpeters—all delicious eating, and their veins filled with sweet juices; works of art made to be destroyed. The guests found themselves munching the roof of a house, and pulling a sugar soldier limb from limb. Every now and then little Turkish boys, turbaned, spangled, and jewelled, came offering, on bended knee, golden bowls of rose-water and orange-water to keep the guests' hands cool and perfumed.

Gerard suddenly remembered that he was the bearer of a letter to the princess, and asked one of the servants to deliver it. The man made a deep obeisance and said he would do so.

Now it may be remembered that Peter and Margaret came to find their cousin, but the old man fell asleep, and Gerard and Margaret were quite content to talk to one another. But the cousin had seen them come in, and as they were poorly dressed he did not wish to acknowledge them before all his fine friends, so he said to himself, 'It will be time to join them when the sun sets and every one goes home; then nobody will see.'

Margaret and Gerard were enjoying the warm sun and the green shade, the rich dresses and the bright music of the lutes, and the cool sound of the fountains and all the faces so happy and gay. Margaret told Gerard she was sure he would gain a prize.

'I hope so,' said Gerard; 'but what makes you think so?'

'Because you were so good to my father,' said Margaret, and so they talked on, and Gerard told her that of all the lovely things there the finest of all was the sight of her hair

in its silver frame, and the setting sun shining upon it. 'An apple of gold in a network of silver,' he called it. And soon he told her that he loved her, and Margaret was at first angry that he, almost a stranger, should say such things, but after a while she was pleased again. For she liked Gerard and could see he was a good youth and meant no harm. People were simpler in those days, and made friends more easily than folk do now.

So Gerard and Margaret sat hand in hand, and talked and watched Peter, the old man, asleep, and all the gay company about them. They were very happy, for they were young, and true of heart and full of life, and such are always happy. It is only men like the burgomaster who need be miserable!

After a while there came a white-haired attendant to their table and asked if one Gerard were present. Upon Gerard's answer, he said: 'The princess would speak with you, young sir; I am to conduct you to her presence.'

Instantly the faces of all within hearing turned sharply round, and were bent with curiosity and envy on the man that was to go to a princess. Gerard rose to obey.

'We shall not see you again,' said Margaret calmly, but colouring a little.

'That will you,' was Gerard's reply; then he whispered in her ear, 'This is my princess; but you are my queen!' He added aloud, 'Wait for me, I pray you, I will soon return.'

'Aye, aye!' said Peter, awaking and speaking at one and the same moment.

CHAPTER 3

Peter and Margaret are lost to Gerard, who sets out for Tergou.

WHEN Gerard was gone, every one continued to stare at the two whose dress was so poor but who were yet with the youth for whom the princess sent. Seeing which, their cousin, William Johnson, came forward and claimed relationship. He pretended to be surprised that he had not seen them before.

‘And to think that I was there quite near and you did not see me!’ said he.

‘Nay, cousin Johnson,’ said Margaret coldly, ‘I saw you long ago.’

‘You saw me and did not speak to me?’

‘Cousin, it was for you to welcome us to Rotterdam, as it is for us to welcome you to our home. Your servant would not let us wait for you in your house.’

‘The idiot!’ said Johnson.

‘And I had a mind to see whether it was “like man like master”, for there is truth in bywords.’

William Johnson blushed crimson. He saw Margaret was keen-witted and suspected him. He did the wisest thing he could, and promptly insisted that they should come home with him at once, and he would show them whether they were welcome or not.

But Margaret was unwilling to go, and soon she gave her reason.

‘It would be ill manners to our friend, and he will lose us. He knows not where we live,’ she said.

But Johnson said the young man should be welcome too, and he would leave his secretary there to wait for him and guide him to the house. He beckoned to the secretary and bade him wait for Gerard. The fellow looked very grave and quite trustworthy, and Johnson affirmed that he would stay all night rather than disobey him and come back without Gerard.

So they went away, and the secretary was left to wait. He sat solemn and grave, and had no thought of leaving his post. But as the time was long he drank cup after cup of the wine that was brought round for the guests. The wine was strong and so was his head, and Gerard had been away quite an hour before the secretary began to be dazed and finally got up to make a speech, and fell full length in drunken stupidity, and rolled under the table.

Thus it came about that when Gerard returned he saw his friends were gone, and only a drunken servant lay sleeping beneath the table. The princess had been very gracious to him, and had complimented him on his skill, and promised him a good place when he should be a priest. ‘Yet,’ she had said, ‘you are young to wish to be a priest. You may desire to marry. But for a priest this is forbidden.’

Gerard had not considered this, but he was young and had no care, so the thought did not trouble him.

He was very distressed to find his friends were gone. He searched about for them, and asked outside the palace if any had seen them pass. But the people in the streets were all excited at the sight of the splendid processions and gaieties, and had no eyes for an old man and a girl, and told him so.

Gerard stayed three days in Rotterdam, and though he looked carefully out for Peter and Margaret he did not see them. At last he turned homewards with a heavy heart, although he had won one prize and fifteen pieces of gold, and had been promised royal favours from the princess.

CHAPTER 4

A happy home-coming. The Burgomaster tells Gerard what he wants to know.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Eli was in his shop. Catherine and her little crippled daughter had long been anxious about Gerard, and were gone a little way down the road to see if he might be coming. Giles was alone in the sitting-room, amusing himself in his own way.

Nature, it would seem, did not intend to make Giles a dwarf. His head and chest and arms were of the usual size, but then nature seemed to have forgotten the rest of him! For below he was stunted and much undersized. The result was that he could do many things that ordinary people cannot; for there was no weight in the lower half of his body, and his arms were strong.

Just now his teeth were firmly fixed in the rim of the big oak table, his legs swaying in the air. He was thoroughly enjoying himself when little Kate happened to come in. She did not appreciate the joy of Giles but thought of the damage his teeth would do to the table.

'Oh Giles!' she cried, 'how can you? Mother is at hand. It dents the table.'

'Go and tell her, little talebearer!' snarled Giles, jumping to the floor. 'You like to make mischief.'

At this unkind accusation Kate began to weep, and the

mother, coming in, wanted to know what was the matter.

'Nothing,' said Kate, 'only Giles spoke foolishly to me, and I am tired and anxious about Gerard.'

'Let no one be anxious for me,' said a faint voice, and there was Gerard at the door, pale and dusty after his long walk.

All were excited at seeing him and keen to ask his news. He sat down in the midst of them and told them of all the wonderful things he had seen. He had gone to the hall where all the work of the competitors was laid out for the judging. 'The coloured work was so beautiful I forgot all about the black and white. But next day, when all the other prizes had been given, they came to the writing, and whose name do you think was called first?'

'Yours,' said Kate.

The others laughed.

'You may well laugh,' said Gerard, 'but for all that Gerard of Tergou was the name the herald shouted. I stood stupid; they thrust me forward. Everything swam before my eyes. I found myself kneeling on a cushion at the feet of the prince. He said something to me, but I was so fluttered I could not answer him. And then he gave me a gold medal, and here it is.' There was a scramble to look at it. 'And then he gave me fifteen golden coins. Here they are.'

'Oh, Gerard!' they all cried.

Then he gave each of them a coin, and two to Kate because she was a cripple, and the rest to his mother. Cornelis and Sybrandt glared with envy at Kate because she had two pieces. Giles rolled his along the floor and jumped after it. Catherine flung her arms round Gerard and wept for joy and pride.

Elias was immensely proud now of his clever son and showed the gold medal to all his neighbours. Gerard told him too how the princess had promised him a post when he should be a priest, and from that time his parents looked upon Gerard as the hope of the family. He would support them all when they were gone. Cornelis and Sybrandt were envious of him and wished to be rid of him. They were evil at heart and jealous of the love all bore to Gerard.

One day the burgomaster sent for Gerard, and he, much wondering, went to see him.

Now the burgomaster wanted to find out what Gerard



knew about Peter and Margaret, whom he had defrauded and was keeping out of their own land. So he artfully tried Gerard with quite another matter first. He offered

him the task of rewriting the town records. Gerard inquired what he was to be paid, and when the burgomaster offered a sum that would have just purchased the pens, ink, and parchment, he refused.

Then the burgomaster in anger said, 'You are idle. You are in love. Your body is with the monks but your heart is with Peter Brandt and his daughter.'

'I know no Peter Brandt,' said Gerard.

'You lie!' shouted the burgomaster. 'Did I not see you with them on the road to Rotterdam?'

'Ah,' said Gerard.

'Yes,' went on the burgomaster, thinking he would trap Gerard. 'And you have been to their house since, their house at Sevenbergen.'

'At Sevenbergen?' asked Gerard.

'Aye!' said the burgomaster. It was a guess on his part put boldly forth as fact, to find out from the young man whether he had been there or not.

But this trick turned out otherwise than he intended. For he had told Gerard just what he longed to know, the name of his friends and their dwelling-place.

'Till now I did not know the name of those you saw me with, nor where they dwelt,' answered Gerard; 'but now you have told me. So thank you, burgomaster, and good day to you!' And he darted out with his eyes sparkling.

Ghysbrecht started up in great anger; but he sank into his chair again.

'He does not fear me. He knows something, if not all.'

Then he called to a trusty servant, and bade him follow Gerard.

'Let me know whither he goes and what he does,' he ordered.

It was dark when the servant returned and reported that Gerard had gone straight to Sevenbergen to the house of Peter.

The burgomaster did not sleep that night!

CHAPTER 5

The lovers meet, but the Burgomaster brews trouble
for them at home.

GERARD found Peter's cottage, and as he drew near he saw the girl in the doorway, knitting and talking to a man past fifty years of age, an old soldier who was a friend of Peter's and lived with them.

Margaret was very surprised to see him and received him coldly, for she thought that he had failed to come and visit them at Rotterdam because he did not wish to see them again. Gerard, on his side, was distressed because they had not waited for him. Neither knew that the messenger had never delivered his message because he had drunk too deeply of the prince's wine.

However, when all was explained, they were as great friends as ever, and when Peter came home they all sat down to supper together. And Gerard and Margaret vowed that they would never misunderstand one another again.

From that day Gerard was often at Sevenbergen, and the two grew to love each other very dearly.

But at home Catherine and Elias knew nothing of Gerard's friends till one day the burgomaster came in and told them.

'Your son,' he said, 'has fallen into bad hands. It is not likely he will be a priest. He will marry Margaret Brandt and then he cannot be a priest.'

At first Catherine refused to believe him. She knew the burgomaster was a wicked man and doubted his words.

'Besides,' she added, 'Gerard thinks of nothing but the holy saints. See how beautifully he has painted this little picture of the Mother of the holy Jesus!' And she showed him a little picture that Gerard had coloured and she had found in the house.

'That?' cried the burgomaster, choking with rage. 'That is no holy saint. That is the very girl, Margaret Brandt!'

Just then a neighbour chanced to come in, and he too recognized the picture.

Imagine how angry Gerard's parents were now ! They had counted upon his becoming a priest, and here, without their knowledge, was Gerard going to marry a wife, and then he would never be a priest at all, and their dreams of a prosperous future would vanish away !

When the burgomaster was gone, Elias tried to comfort Catherine.

'This love of Gerard's', he told her, 'will pass away. It is only a boyish fancy. I will make him be a priest. He must obey his father.'

Then Catherine began to tremble, for she did not wish his father to be harsh, or perhaps, cruel to Gerard. In those days it was quite a common thing for a father to have his son kept in prison till he consented to obey some order he had given him, and he might inflict all kinds of punishment upon him.

So Catherine began to plead with Elias and remind him how happy they had been together as man and wife.

'Why, you know I have been happy,' said Eli. 'Friends I have known, but none like thee. What is said of a wife ?

"She doth joy double
And halveth trouble."

And so I have found the byword true, my dear.'

Catherine trembled and held her husband's hand tight and they went out together in the moonlight to meet the young Gerard who was late in coming home.

He came along the road singing, his face shining with joy.

CHAPTER 6

Martin goes hunting and fights with the Prince's leopard
in the wood.

WHILE the burgomaster was bringing all this disturbance into Gerard's home, strange events were happening at Sevenbergen. Gerard was expected there for supper, and Margaret had no food in the house. She turned to Martin, the old soldier, and asked him to go out into the forest, on the edge of which the cottage stood, and shoot something. As an old soldier he had been granted permission to shoot

buck or other game in the prince's forest once a week, except on days when the prince himself was hunting. And by an unlucky chance on this very day a hunt was arranged for the prince!

He told Margaret this, but seeing her so sad, he added, 'But cheer up! for your sake I will risk the fine or punishment. I will go but to the skirts of the wood, and surely I shall see some hare or fawn within reach of my arrow.'

Margaret was unwilling that he should risk the penalty for her, but at last consented, and old Martin went forth with his bow and arrows. He could hear the sound of horns blowing in the distance, and soon out of the dense forest rushed a hare. Martin levelled his big bow; the arrow flew, the string twanged, but Martin had been in a hurry and the arrow struck the ground just under the hare which sped off. Martin cursed himself for his bad shooting, and just then heard a great rustling in the trees and turned round in time to see a fine buck dash into the open, and across into the forest again. A moment later a long, spotted animal glided swiftly across after the deer, and Martin recognized the leopard which the prince kept for hunting. 'The hunters will not be far from her,' thought he; 'I must not be seen. Gerard must go supperless this night.'

He plunged into the wood, following the buck and leopard, for that was his way home. He had not gone far when he heard an unusual sound ahead of him—leaves rustling violently and a trampling on the ground. He hurried in the direction of the sound and found the leopard on the buck's back, tearing him with teeth and claws, and the buck running in a circle and bounding up, the blood pouring down his side.

Then Martin formed a desperate resolution to have the venison of the buck for Margaret. He drew his arrow and shot the buck in the head. It jumped into the air and fell dead. The leopard went on tearing the buck as if nothing had happened.

'Now', thought Martin, 'he will gorge himself with the blood and then go off.' But when he had waited some minutes, and the leopard showed no signs of leaving the buck, he walked up and laid his hand on the buck's leg.

The leopard gave a fearful growl and left off sucking the blood. She saw what Martin wanted and was on her guard. What was to be done ?

Martin had heard that wild creatures cannot face the human eye. Accordingly, he stood erect and fixed his eye on the leopard's. The leopard returned a savage glance and never took her eye off Martin. Then she flew at his head with a frightful yell, flaming eyes, and jaws and claws distended. Martin had but just time to catch her by the throat, before her teeth could crush his face ; one of her claws seized his shoulder and rent it, the other aimed at his cheek, but Martin wore his cloak over his head instead of a cap, and the brute's claw caught in the loose stuff. Martin kept her teeth off his face with great difficulty, and gripped her throat fiercely, as she kept rending his shoulder. The pain of it was terrible ; but the old soldier's courage was aroused and he squeezed her neck with iron force. Presently her long tail, that was high in the air, went down, and soon the great body ceased to heave and the claws relaxed their grip. Martin let go his hold and the leopard sank down mute at his feet with tongue protruding and bloody paw : and, for the first time, terror fell upon Martin. ' I am a dead man ! ' he muttered, ' I have slain the prince's leopard ! '

He hastily seized a handful of leaves and threw them over her ; then put the buck on his shoulder and staggered away, leaving a trail of blood behind him—his own and the buck's. He burst into Peter's house, a horrible figure, bleeding and blood-stained, and flung the carcass down.

' There, no questions ! ' said he, ' but broil me a steak of it, for I am faint.'

Margaret did not see he was wounded, and while she was busy at the cooking he bound up his wound apart, and soon he, Gerard, and Margaret were supping on the broiled venison. They were very merry, and Martin revived and told them how the venison was got.

But their mirth was strangely interrupted. Suddenly Margaret became pale with fear ; she gasped and could not speak, but pointed to the window with trembling finger. Their eyes followed hers, and there in the twilight couched a dark form with great gleaming eyes.

It was the leopard !

While they stood as if turned to stone, there sounded in the wood a single deep bay. Martin trembled at it.

'They have lost her, and laid bloodhounds on her track. They will find her here, and the venison. Good-bye, friends ; this is the end of Martin !'

Gerard seized the bow. 'Be a man,' he cried, 'shoot her and fling her into the wood. Who will know ?'

And Martin would have done it, but Margaret rushed up and seized the bow out of his hands. The air at the same time was loud with the cry of hounds, hot upon the scent.

'What have you done, girl ? You have taken away my only chance !' cried Martin.

'No !' replied Margaret, 'I have saved you. Your knife, quick !'

She seized his long knife and darted from the room. The house was now surrounded with baying dogs and shouting men. But those eyes, like green fire, moved not. Margaret cut off a huge piece of venison, and running to the window threw it out. The leopard darted on it with a savage snarl ; there was a sound of rending and crunching ; a hound uttered a bay near, and the leopard, fearing to lose her supper, glided swiftly and stealthily away with it towards the woods. Next moment men and hounds came rushing in pursuit past the window and followed the leopard into the forest.

Martin and his companions breathed again. The leopard, they knew, was swift and would not be caught within miles of the house. No one would know of Martin's rash act in the forest that day.

CHAPTER 7

Angry words between father and son.

GERARD walked home prouder than ever of Margaret, who had saved old Martin from nothing less than the penalty of death by her ready wit. That is why he was singing as he came down the road in the moonlight.

Suddenly he saw two figures in the shadow of the trees. They were his father and mother, and a chill fell upon him.

He stopped and looked at them ; they stood grim and silent. He stammered out some words of inquiry.

‘ Why ask ? ’ said his father ; ‘ you know why we are here.’

‘ Oh, Gerard ! ’ said his mother, with a voice full of reproach and yet of affection.

Gerard’s heart quaked ; he was silent. Then his father spoke to him, not unkindly.

‘ You are to be a priest, my son. No marrying for you ! But give your promise not to go to Sevenbergen again, and we won’t be hard on you for this one fault this time.’

‘ I cannot promise that, father.’

‘ Not promise it, you young hypocrite.’

‘ Nay, father, do not abuse me. I lacked courage to tell you what I knew would vex you ; and I am glad that some one has let you know. It is a load off my mind. Yes, father, I love Margaret, and I will never be a priest. I will die sooner.’

‘ That we shall see, young man. You will learn what it is to defy a father ! ’

Gerard said no more, and the three walked home in gloomy silence. From that hour the little house at Tergou was no longer the abode of peace. All but little Kate and Giles, the dwarf, were against Gerard. He met with harsh words and cold looks from those who but yesterday were kind and loving. Sybrandt and Cornelis were very angry at the thought that Gerard might marry perhaps and not be a priest, for in that case their father might give a share of his savings to Gerard, and it would not all come to them.

All this made Gerard very bitter, but it is likely he would have submitted and obeyed his father, had not the latter one day told him, before all the family, that he should be a priest within the year or he would have him put in prison.

Gerard turned pale with anger at this threat.

‘ Is it so ? ’ he cried. ‘ Then hear me, all. I swear I will never be a priest while Margaret lives. Since force is to decide it, and not love and duty, try force, father ; but force shall not serve you, for the day I see them come to take me to prison, that day I will leave Tergou and my father’s house and Holland, too, for ever.’

And he rushed out of the room white with anger and in despair.

'There!' cried his mother, 'that comes of driving young folk too hard! But men are crueller than tigers, even to their own flesh and blood. Now, Heaven forbid he should ever leave us, married or single.'

CHAPTER 8

A wedding ceremony is rudely interrupted.

As Gerard came out of the house he met the servant of Lady Van Eyck, who said her mistress wished to speak with him. He found the old lady seated grim as a judge.

'I thought we had been friends, young sir,' she said, in sarcastic tones.

At this Gerard was confused and disturbed.

'It is because you never told her you were in love,' said the servant, pitying his confusion.

'Alas!' said Gerard, 'I did not dare to tell you my folly.'

'What folly?' said the lady, 'Is it folly to love?'

'I am told so every day of my life,' said poor Gerard.

Then he told his kind old friend all his trouble.

The Lady Van Eyck had never married. She had been content to live in the house of her brothers and devote herself to the art she loved so well.

'But now?' she said to Gerard, 'I gave up the sweet joys of wifedom and motherhood for what? For my dear brothers? They are dead. For my art? That has all but left me too. I have the skill yet, but what avails that when the hand trembles and the eye is dim? Gerard, I love you as though you were my son. You are good, you are handsome, you are a painter. I will not let you throw your youth away as I did mine; you shall marry this Margaret. She is a good daughter, as I hear, and will be a good wife.'

Gerard listened. But he went on to tell her that he was not afraid of his father's threat; he was sure his father did not mean really to imprison him. The trouble was that he had no money. If he had that, he might marry Margaret secretly, and then both of them would go away and come

back after some years, and go to his parents and say, 'My dear father and mother, we do not seek money from you; we but ask you to love us as once you used, and as we have never ceased to love you!'

The old lady's eyes sparkled.

'It remains to be seen,' she said, 'whether you have the spirit to carry out your excellent plan. There is a country, Gerard, where certain fortune awaits you at this moment. In Italy painters are honoured like princes, and scribes are paid three hundred crowns for copying a single manuscript. Do you not know that his Holiness the Pope has written to every country for skilful scribes to copy the hundreds of precious manuscripts that are pouring into that favoured land from Constantinople, whence learning and learned men are driven out?'

'Nay, I did not know that,' said Gerard; 'but it has been the dream and hope of my life to visit Italy, that land of all the arts. But oh! the long journey, and we are all so poor.'

'Find the heart to go, and I'll find the means. I know where to lay my hands on ten golden angels;¹ they will take you to Rome, and the girl with you if she loves you as she ought.'

They sat and talked long over this plan, and Lady Van Eyck not only gave him money for the journey, but also taught him many of the secrets of painting which she had learned from her brothers and famous artists long since dead.

The next day Gerard went to Margaret and told her. But when it came to the point, she refused.

'As long as your father is bent on your being a priest,' she said, 'I cannot marry you, Gerard, dearly as I love you.'

Then Gerard was impatient and unjust.

'Very well!' he cried, 'then you will drive me to be a priest. My parents hate me in earnest, but my lover only loves me in jest.'

So with this bitter speech he went away home, and left Margaret weeping.

But a few hours later he came running back, with the fragments of a picture in his hand, and panting with anger and grief.

¹ Coins of the period.

'There, Margaret, see ! see ! the wretches ! Look at their spite ! They have cut your portrait to pieces !'

It was the picture of Margaret that Gerard had painted. His mother, as we have seen, had found it, and in anger, after the burgomaster's visit, had broken it in pieces.

'Who did it ?' asked Margaret, blushing at the insult of this malice.

'Nay, I do not know,' replied Gerard, 'I dared not ask for I should hate the hand that did it, aye, till my dying day. See, they have hacked through your very face, the sweet face that every one who knows it loves.'

'Never mind, Gerard,' said Margaret, 'since this is how they treat you for my sake, well then, you have been robbed of the portrait, but you shall have the face itself, such as it is.'

'Oh, Margaret !' cried Gerard.

'Yes,' said Margaret, 'forgive me for refusing you. I will be your wife ; to-morrow, if it is your pleasure.'

Gerard kissed her hands and then her lips, and in a tumult of joy ran for Peter and Martin. They came and witnessed the betrothal, a solemn ceremony in those days, scarcely less important than the marriage itself. A few days went by before the marriage ceremony could take place, for public notice had to be given of it in the church.

These were anxious days for Gerard, for, since he was under twenty-one years of age, his father could stop the ceremony if he heard of it in time. Secrecy, therefore, was absolutely necessary. Luckily no one seemed to gain any knowledge of what was about to take place in the church of Sevenbergen, for it was some distance from Tergou, where people knew Gerard.

At ten o'clock on the appointed morning Gerard and Margaret arrived at the church, he radiant with joy, and she with blushes. Margaret had been unwilling to go to Italy ; she could not leave her old father. So it was decided that after the ceremony they should retire into the neighbouring country of Flanders for a few weeks till the storm of anger at Tergou had passed away. But the solemn ceremony had scarce begun, and the priest was uttering the sacred vows, when a harsh voice cried out 'Stay !' and the constables of Tergou came up the church and seized Gerard in the name of the law.

Martin, the old soldier, was standing by, and his long knife flashed out instantly, but the priest cried to him to put it back in that sacred building.

Then the official of the burgomaster explained, 'This young man would marry against his father's will, and his father has prayed our burgomaster to deal with him according to the law. Let him deny it if he can.'

'Is this so, young man?' asked the priest; and Gerard could but hang his head.

'We take him to Rotterdam to await the sentence of the prince,' said one of the constables.

At this Margaret uttered a cry of despair, and the young creatures who were so happy a moment ago, fell to sobbing in one another's arms so piteously, that even the constables were ashamed of their cruelty in parting them, and one whispered to Margaret, 'We take him not to Rotterdam, but to the prison at Tergou.' Then they took him away on horseback on the road to Rotterdam, but after a few miles turned round and went by side-roads to Tergou. Just outside the town they halted, and Gerard was put into a cart covered with canvas, and secretly conveyed to the prison which was by the burgomaster's house. He was taken up several flights of stairs, and thrust into a small room, lighted only by a narrow window with an iron bar across it. The only furniture was a huge oak chest.

CHAPTER 9

Gerard is in prison, but his friends are not idle.

WHAT had happened was this. His jealous brothers, Cornelis and Sybrandt, had heard by chance of the coming ceremony of marriage. This did not suit their plans at all, but how prevent it? Their father was away from home. Then they thought of the burgomaster. He had informed their parents of Gerard's love for Margaret. Obviously he was opposed to this marriage, though they were not cunning enough to discover why.

To the burgomaster they went. He saw at once that they were acting in malice and not in regard for their absent father as they pretended, but he did not let them see this.

'Since the father of the family is not here,' said he, with magisterial dignity, 'his duty falls on me, who am the father of the town. Leave all to me; but do not tell your mother, nor any one else.'

Thus it came about that Gerard was a prisoner, and in the power of the burgomaster, who suspected him as a possible enemy. Imprisonment in those days often meant death; it involved cold and starvation, unbroken solitude, torture, and often poison.

No wonder Gerard was in despair. 'There is more here than my father's wrath,' he said to himself. And he kneeled down and prayed to God to deliver him from this crafty man, the burgomaster.

Presently he rose, and sprang up at the iron bar of the window and clutched it. By pressing his knees against the wall he was able to hang on for a moment and look out. And then he saw a sight such as none but a captive can appreciate. It was the back of a friend, the back of old Martin.

Martin was sitting quietly fishing in the brook that ran near the prison. Gerard sprang again at the window and whistled. Martin instantly showed that he was watching much harder than fishing. He turned hastily round and saw Gerard, made him a signal, and taking up his line went quickly off.

Gerard saw by this that his friends were not idle; yet he had rather Martin had stayed. The very sight of him was a comfort. He held on, looking at the soldier's retiring form as long as he could, then falling back somewhat heavily, wrenched the rusty iron bar away from the stonework just as the burgomaster opened the door stealthily behind him. The burgomaster instantly saw the iron and then glanced at the window; but he said nothing. The window was a hundred feet from the ground; and if Gerard had a fancy for jumping out, why should he balk it? He brought a brown loaf and a pitcher of water, and set them on the chest in silence. Gerard's first impulse was to knock him over the head with the iron bar and fly down the stairs; but the burgomaster guessed his thought, gave a little cough, and three stout fellows, armed, showed themselves directly at the door.

'My orders are to keep you thus until you shall bind

yourself by an oath to leave Margaret Brandt and become a priest,' said the burgomaster.

'Death sooner,' was Gerard's retort.

'With all my heart.' And the burgomaster retired.

Now Martin went with all speed to Margaret and Peter and told them how he had seen Gerard at the window.

'He is in the haunted tower,' he said; 'right at the top of it.'

'Was he pale?' asked Margaret, tearfully.

'A little.'

'Looked he anxious?'

'Nay, nay; as bright as a piece of silver!'

'Oh, then that must have been at the sight of you, Martin. He counts on us to help him.'

Margaret had written a letter to a friend at the prince's court at Rotterdam, asking for help for Gerard, and now she held it out for Martin to take. But here old Peter interposed.

'There is no need for letters,' he said; 'Put not your trust in the help of great men.'

'Alas! father,' sighed Margaret; 'what else have we to trust in?'

'Knowledge,' said the old man.

'Alas! your knowledge cannot serve us here. Think of the height. No ladder in Holland could reach Gerard in that tower.'

'I need no ladder,' said Peter. 'What I want is a gold crown.'

'But the burgomaster will not be bribed to let Gerard go free. He hates him.'

'I tell you,' said Peter, 'there was a knight of Florence shut up in a tower higher than this of Gerard's; yet did his faithful servant stand at the tower foot and get him cut, with no other means but that bow you have in your hand, Martin, and a few trifles that I will buy for a crown.'

So the letter did not go to Rotterdam, but they trusted to Peter's learning instead.

CHAPTER 10

A perilous escape from the Haunted Tower.

It was nine o'clock that night and the clear moonlight shone into the little room where Giles the dwarf was sleeping. Suddenly he woke up with a start and saw a white figure standing at the foot of the bed.

With an unearthly noise, between a yell and a snarl, he rolled off his bed and under it, and from that secure retreat he heard a soft voice say, 'Why, Giles, are you afraid of me?'

At this Giles' head peeped cautiously up, and he saw it was only his sister Kate. She put her finger to her lips to bid him be silent lest Cornelis or Sybrandt should hear them. And then she told him quietly how she had heard them plotting together, and had discovered that even now Gerard was confined in the haunted tower. There must be some treachery, she was sure, for their father was away, and he would never have ordered this cruel act. She proposed, therefore, that she and Giles should go to the foot of the tower and call to Gerard to comfort him.

'Dear Giles, I would go alone, but I am afraid of the spirits that men say haunt the tower; but with you I shall not be afraid.'

'Nor I with you,' said Giles. 'I don't believe there are any spirits in Tergou. I never saw one. This last was the likeliest one I ever saw; and it was but you, Kate, after all!'

In less than half an hour they started out. Kate made Giles carry a lantern, for she said it gave her courage against the evil spirits.

Meanwhile Gerard's heart was very low within him as he sat all alone in the tower. The sun had gone down and he was hungry, for he dared not eat the food that Ghysbrecht had brought. He feared poison. Suddenly something struck the wall opposite the window very sharply, and then rattled on the floor at his feet. It was an arrow; he saw the white feather of it. A chill ran through him; they meant then to kill him from outside! He crouched down

in a corner, but no more missiles came. He crawled along the floor and took up the arrow ; there was no head to it. He uttered a cry of hope ; had a friendly hand shot it ? Feeling it all over, he found a soft substance attached to it. Tied to the arrow was a skein of silk, and on the arrow itself were words written.

He read them eagerly in the light of the moon.

‘ Well-beloved, make fast the silk to thy knife and lower to us ; but hold thine end fast ; then count an hundred and draw up.’

Gerard seized the oak chest and dragged it to the window. Standing on it and looking down, he saw figures far below. He waved his hand to them. Then he undid the silk and made one end fast to his knife and lowered it till it ceased to draw. Then he counted a hundred and pulled the silk carefully up. It came up a little heavier, and after a while he felt a large knot, and by that knot a stout cord was fastened to the silk. He could not understand what was meant, but still drew up until there was another knot and the coil gave place to rope, and then the weight grew heavier still. Now he saw what was intended and hauled up feverishly. The weight became heavier and heavier, and looking down he saw a sight that revived his failing powers ; it was, as it were, a great snake coming up to him out of the deep shadow cast by the tower. He gave a shout of joy, and pulled up wildly, and soon a thick new rope was in his hands. He dragged the end into his prison, and passed it through both handles of the chest and knotted it firmly.

The first thing to do was to make sure that the chest was firm and would resist his weight when he was poised in mid-air. So he jumped with all his force upon it. At the third jump the whole side of the chest burst open, and out fell a quantity of parchments. After the first start this gave him, Gerard comprehended that the chest had not broken, but, in jumping, he had touched some secret spring. The chest would hold his weight after all, but he also wedged the iron bar, with the rope fastened to it, in the opening of the window. He now mounted the chest, and so put his foot through the window and sat half in and half out, with one hand on that part of the rope which was inside. In the silent night he heard his own heart beat.

The free air breathed on his face and gave him the courage

to risk what we must all lose one day—for liberty. Many dangers awaited him, but the greatest was the first—getting on to the rope outside.

Gerard reflected. Finally he put himself in the attitude of a swimmer, his body to the waist being in the prison, his legs outside. Then holding the inside rope with both hands, he felt anxiously with his feet for the outside rope, and when he had got it, he worked it in between his feet, and kept it there tight, then he uttered a short prayer, and, all the calmer for it, put his left hand on the sill and gradually wriggled out. Then he seized the iron bar, and for one fearful moment hung outside from it by his right hand, while his left hand felt for the rope down at his knees; it was too tight against the wall for his fingers to get round it higher up. The moment he had fairly grasped it he left the bar, and swiftly seized the rope with the right hand too; but in doing this his body necessarily fell about a yard. A stifled cry came up from below. Gerard hung in mid air. He clenched his teeth and pressed the rope tight with his feet and gripped it with his hands, and went down slowly hand below hand. He passed by one huge rough stone after another. He looked up and he looked down. The moon shone into his prison window; it seemed very near. The figures below seemed an awful distance. It made him dizzy to look down; so he fixed his eyes steadily on the wall close to him and went slowly, down, down. The rope made his hands very hot. He stole another look up. The prison window was a good way off, now. Down, down, down. He looked up. The window was so distant he ventured now to turn his eyes downward, and there, not more than thirty feet below him, were Margaret and Martin, their hands upstretched towards him. He could see their eyes and their teeth shine in the moonlight. For their mouths were open, and they were breathing hard.

‘Take care, Gerard!’ they cried, ‘oh, take care. Look not down.’

‘Fear not,’ cried Gerard, joyfully, and came down faster.

In another minute his feet were at their hands. They seized him ere he touched the ground, and all three clung together in one embrace.

‘Hush! away in silence, dear one!’

They stole along the shadow of the wall. But ere they

had gone many yards a stream of light shot suddenly from an angle of the building and lay across their path like a barrier of fire, and they heard whispers and footsteps close at hand.

‘Back!’ hissed Martin. ‘Keep in the shadow.’

They hurried back, passed the dangling rope, and made for a little square projecting tower. They had barely rounded it, when the light shot trembling past them and flickered uncertainly into the distance.

‘A lantern!’ groaned Martin, in a whisper. ‘They are after us.’

‘Give me my knife,’ whispered Gerard, ‘I’ll never be taken alive.’

Martin strung his bow and fitted an arrow to the string.

‘In war never wait to be struck,’ said that old soldier; ‘I will kill one or two ere they know where this death comes from.’ Then motioning his companions to be quiet he crept up to the corner of the wall and looked round it, holding his bow ready to take aim the moment the enemy should offer a mark.

Gerard and Margaret held their breath in horrible expectation; they had never seen a human being killed.

Gerard was hoping the burgomaster was of the party, for he knew that Martin would shoot straight, not caring if he shot the burgomaster himself. But a strange thing happened. They saw the bow waver and shake in the hands of Martin, and the stout old soldier staggered back to them, his knees knocking and his cheeks pale with fear. He let his arrow fall and clutched Gerard’s shoulder.

‘Let me feel flesh and blood,’ he gasped; ‘the haunted tower! the haunted tower!’

Margaret and Gerard began to share his terror. They ventured to ask what it was that alarmed him so.

‘Hush!’ he cried, ‘it will hear you. Up the wall! It is going up the wall! Its head is on fire. It is going up the wall as men walk upon a level road. The devils are abroad to-night!’

‘I will venture forth to look,’ said Gerard, trembling.

‘Go alone, then!’ said Martin. ‘I have looked on it once and live.’

CHAPTER 11

The Ghost on the Tower. A find of parchment.

WHEN Gerard came round the angle of the tower he expected to see not a devil, but some wicked contrivance of his enemy the burgomaster. He believed some attempt was being made to get at his prison and kill him, for his escape from it could hardly have become known as yet. As he stole forth a soft but brave hand crept into his, and Margaret was by his side to share this new peril.

No sooner was the haunted tower visible, than a sight struck their eyes that benumbed them as they stood. More than half-way up the tower a creature with a fiery head was steadily mounting the wall; the body was dark, but its outline could be seen through the glare from the head, and the whole creature was not much less than four feet long. At the foot of the tower stood a thing in white.

Gerard and Margaret gasped with awe. 'It is going up the rope,' whispered Gerard in terror.

As they gazed, the fiery creature disappeared into Gerard's late prison, but its light could be seen from the cell inside. The white figure stood motionless below.

Now it is a strange thing that people who are under the influence of deadly fear sometimes feel a curious impulse to hurl themselves at the object of their terror. Margaret now had this feeling, and in a moment, with a wild cry, darted forward from Gerard's side, towards the white ghost. But now the white ghost uttered a very human scream and fell on its knees imploring mercy of Margaret.

'Why, it is a woman!' said the latter, hardly yet restored to her senses.

Then the two spoke to one another, and soon all was made clear. Gerard came up and recognized his little sister Kate, and she told them how Giles and she had started to try and find out about Gerard and help him if they could. They had reached the haunted tower, and to their surprise found a new rope dangling from the prison window to the ground.

Kate had looked upon this as the work of devils. How

else could a rope be in such a position ? But Giles had sprung at this find with vast delight. It was always his joy to go up things ; all the instincts of his climbing nature were aroused, and he refused to listen to the warnings of Kate ; the utmost he would concede to her fears of devils was to tie the lantern on his head to scare them off. And so with his huge arms and little body he had gone up the rope faster than his brother had come down it. The light of the lantern on his head had made him into that terrifying figure which had so completely deceived Martin.

As they were talking thus at the foot of the rope, they heard a horrible noise overhead and looking up saw the dwarf, yelling, 'Parchments ! parchments !', with his arms full of them. The light made him look a fiendish sight. He hurled the parchments down and quickly followed them. He was wild with joy, and at once proposed to sell all the parchments to Gerard, to whom he had been in the habit of selling any bits of parchment he could get, since Gerard needed them for his work and paid him a few pence for them.

'Hush !' said Gerard ; 'you speak too loud. Gather them up and follow us to a safer place than this.'

Then Kate asked Gerard if he would come home with her to their father's house, and told him how she had discovered the plot of Cornelis and Sybrandt, his envious brothers, against him. But Gerard was sure his father must have given the burgomaster some authority to put him in prison, and refused to go back. He would have nothing more to do with his home nor his family.

'While there is another town left, I'll never trouble you again, Tergou,' he cried bitterly.

Kate was very unhappy at this, but Margaret whispered to her that perhaps his anger would grow less and he would forgive and go home again after all.

Gerard gave the dwarf a few small coins for the parchments. Margaret did not wish him to take them. 'They are not ours,' she said. But Gerard maintained that it was quite fair to rob an enemy. The burgomaster had wished to deprive him of liberty, perhaps life ; surely he might take his old parchments in retaliation ? So Kate and Giles went to their home while Margaret and Gerard rejoined Martin and all three went off together to Sevenbergen.

CHAPTER 12

The burgomaster's loss. Gerard in worse danger than ever.

THE burgomaster himself kept the key of Gerard's prison. He waited till ten o'clock before visiting him in the morning for he wanted Gerard to feel hunger and despair, as he could deal with him better in that state. He heard no sound as he listened outside the door, and he chuckled to himself, 'By this time he will be down-hearted !'

He opened the door. No Gerard ! The burgomaster stood stupefied.

His servant, who was behind, saw that something must be wrong, for his master first stood uncertain, then began to shake, and finally threw himself on his knees before the old chest and began to feel it all over with quivering fingers.

The servant gazed at him in wonder.

'Why, master, what is the matter ?'

Ghysbrecht's pale lips worked as if he would answer, but no sound came.

'Why, master, what is the good of glaring into that empty box ? The lad is not there. He has gone and in some cunning way too.' And he glanced at the window.

'Gone ! gone !' shrieked the burgomaster and he sprang up and seized his servant by the throat, and shook him in his rage.

'Why do you stand there, knave, and see your master robbed ? Run ! fly ! Fool that I was to leave it in the same room with him ! Another man would never have found the spring. It was fated ! It was fated !' And he sank down exhausted, muttering 'lost ! lost !'

'What is lost, master ?' asked the servant.

'House and lands and good name,' groaned Ghysbrecht, and wrung his hands feebly.

'What ?' cried the servant, in great wonder at these strange words.

But the tone of his voice aroused the cunning of the burgomaster. He saw that it would not do to let this

servant see what he had really lost, so he stammered, 'I have lost the town records.'

'Oh, is that all?' said the servant.

'Is it not enough?' cried the burgomaster. 'A hundred crowns to him who shall recover them; all, mind, all that were in this box. If one be missing, I give nothing.'

'Tis a bargain, master,' said the servant; 'the crowns are almost mine already for I'll easily find this lad Gerard, and where he is there will the parchments be.'

'That is good. Faithful Brower! Find them all, all that were in the chest.'

'Master, I will take the constables to Gerard's house, and seize him for the theft.'

'The theft? Aye! It is theft. I forgot that. So, as he is a thief now, we will put him in the dungeons below, where the toads are and the rats. And he must never come out again alive, Brower. Quick! ere he has time to talk, you know, time to talk.'

In less than half an hour Brower and four constables entered Gerard's home and demanded where he was. His panic-stricken mother asked what he had done. The men made light of it. He would only be reprimanded and let go again, they said. His mother was deceived by their smooth words, but she could not tell them where Gerard was, for she herself did not know.

But little Kate marked the eager manner of the men, and she went out after them and told them that Gerard had left Tergou and was now miles away. They would probably find the missing parchments in some ditch or other where he had thrown them. Thus she deceived them as to the real hiding-place of Gerard, and the men went off on a false search. She watched them out of sight and then ran in search of Giles. He must go at once and borrow a mule and be off to warn Gerard at the Brandt's house at Sevenbergen. She could not go herself because she was a cripple, but she gave Giles the message and made him repeat it several times till he could say it correctly. He was to warn Gerard to fly from Holland at once, and he was to go to him by a roundabout way so that no one should guess where he was going.

CHAPTER 13

The lovers at Sevenbergen delay their parting too long.

GERARD and Margaret had gone gaily to Sevenbergen after the escape from prison, and you may imagine how they rejoiced in this recovered liberty after being so cruelly parted. But they saw that they could not be together for long even now, since it was certain the burgomaster would never rest till he had revenged himself on Gerard. Gerard told them his plans for going to Italy, but Margaret said she could not, for all her longing, go with him, since she could not leave her aged father nor take him with them. Gerard recognized that this was true, but he could think of no other plan than that he should go to Italy and earn money, and come back again later on when men had forgotten his adventures with the burgomaster.

The next morning found them resigned to part but neither had the courage to say when; and it is doubtful whether the hour of parting ever would have struck, but for the arrival of Giles with the urgent message from Kate. He had ridden many miles round, in coming to them, to avoid suspicion, and it was afternoon before he reached the cottage.

‘Brother Gerard,’ cried he, in his loud voice, ‘Kate bids you run for your life. They charge you with theft and by taking the parchments you have given them the chance of accusing you. But the parchments are only an excuse; they mean to kill you. Delay not, but fly away at once.’

His words were like a thunderclap, so sudden and so terrible were the tidings. Giles told them all he had seen—the visit of the men to the house, their anger at losing Gerard, their hatred of him shown so clearly in their faces. Gerard resolved to go at once but first he would bury the parchments.

‘That old villain, the burgomaster, shall not have them back,’ he said.

So he said farewell to Giles and sent him back to Kate; then he called to Martin and told him what had happened.

'Go you out along the road,' he said, 'and watch while I bury these parchments.'

Martin went out, saying he would shoot an arrow into the oak-tree that was in the garden in order to warn them, if he saw Brower and the men approaching. So Gerard dug a deep hole in the garden and threw in the parchments one by one. They were nearly all charters and records relating to the town, but one, he noticed, appeared to be a private deed, or contract, between Brandt, the dead grandfather of Margaret, and Ghysbrecht.

'This is as much yours as his,' said Gerard, 'I will read this.'

'Oh, not now, Gerard, not now,' cried Margaret; 'every moment you lose fills me with fear; and, see, large drops of rain are beginning to fall, and the clouds are black.'

Gerard yielded and thrust the parchment into his coat while he filled in the earth over the others and stamped it down. Then there came a flash of lightning and a peal of thunder, and the rain started to fall. Gerard and Margaret ran back into the house, and Martin quickly followed them.

'The road is clear,' said he, 'and a heavy storm coming on.'

His words proved true. The thunder sounded nearer and nearer till it crashed overhead, and the flashes of the lightning followed close on one another, like the strokes of a whip, and the rain fell in torrents.

Gerard put up the shutters so that Margaret should not see the vivid lightning, and he put in fear, and as the storm continued, they sat down to supper. But Gerard and Margaret could not eat; the thought that this was the last time they would sup together took away from them all desire for food.

Now it was late at night and old Peter retired to bed. But Margaret and Gerard sat up longer for he was to go at the first gleam of dawn, and they wished to lose none of these remaining minutes in sleep. Martin sat with them, too, for he was mending his bow. Suddenly, as they were talking softly, the old man held up his hand, and they all became silent.

Outside they could hear a footstep crackle faintly upon the autumn leaves that lay scattered before the door.

To those who had nothing to fear such a step would have meant nothing; but to those who had enemies it was terrible. For it was a foot trying to be noiseless!

Martin made ready his bow, and blew out the candle. At this moment, to their horror, they heard more than one footstep approach the other door of the cottage very stealthily, and then there was a pause.

They remembered how Kate had said, 'Fly at once!' and Margaret moaned in anguish because she had kept Gerard back.

'Hush! girl!' said Martin, in a stern whisper.

A heavy knock fell on the door.

CHAPTER 14

Gerard's pursuers are deceived, but yet one finds him.

As if this had been a signal, the back door was struck as rudely the next instant. They were hemmed in!

But at these alarming sounds Margaret seemed to lose her fear. She whispered to Martin, 'Say Gerard *was* here, but is gone.' And with this she seized Gerard and almost dragged him up the steps that led into her father's sleeping apartment beyond which was her own.

The blows on the door were repeated.

'Who knocks at this hour?' cried Martin.

'Open, and you will see,' came the answer.

'I open not to thieves—honest men are all abed now.'

'Open, in the name of the law, Martin, or you shall repent it.'

'Why that is Dirk Brower's voice. What are you doing so far from Tergou?'

'Open and you will know.'

Martin drew the bolt, very slowly, and in rushed Brower and four more. They let in their companion who was at the back door.

'Now, Martin, where is Gerard, son of Elias?'

'Gerard?' said Martin, feigning surprise; 'why he was here but now.'

'Was here?' said Brower, looking very disappointed.

'And where is he now?'

'They say he has gone to Italy.'

Old Martin sat himself down again by the fire and very coolly answered all their inquiries.

'I'll tell you,' said he carelessly. 'His brother Giles, a little ugly imp, all head and arms, came tearing over here on a mule and bawled out something. I was too far off to hear what it was he said, but anyhow it started Gerard. For there was a deal of crying, and then Gerard went off. They say he is gone to Italy. Perhaps you may know where that is, for I don't.'

The men were utterly deceived, for Martin told his tale well. He told the one falsehood he was bade to tell, and not a lie more that might have aroused suspicion.

The men believed him. Indeed, they had told the burgomaster on setting out that Gerard would have got away.

'All we shall gain by this job is a wet coat, mates!' said Brower angrily.

Martin grinned coolly in his face.

'However,' added Brower, 'to content the burgomaster, we will search the house.'

Martin turned grave directly.

This change of countenance did not escape Brower. He reflected a moment.

'Watch outside, two of you, that no one jump from the upper windows. The rest come with me.'

He snatched up a candle and led the way up the stairs to Peter's room.

Old Martin was left alone. He was in despair. He seemed to have done so well, and now—! Gerard must be either in Peter's or in Margaret's room. Perhaps he would jump from a window, and then he and Martin could deal together with the man on guard beneath the window. Yet no sound came. Martin could see the light in Peter's room, and watched. He was angry with Gerard, for he thought the lad would let himself be captured like a fool. Then it occurred to his mind that if Gerard were captured he himself would be in a bad case. Immediately he took a terrible resolve. He bolted both the doors. He took up his bow and laid six arrows ready, and placed his knife beside him. There he waited at the foot of the stairs ready to shoot the men down as they appeared. There would be

four against him, but he had seen men panic-stricken before by such an unexpected attack.

Faint cries came from the inner bedroom.

'They have taken him,' groaned Martin, and this old soldier whom we have seen shake in terror at the strange light upon the tower, set his teeth in grim determination and stood ready to do battle, and win or die.

Meanwhile, the men had carefully searched Peter's room. They had opened cupboards and looked under his bed. They had tried every possible hiding-place, but had found no Gerard.

Then they went on to Margaret's room, but the very sight of it was discouraging. It was small and bare, and not a cupboard in it. They saw Margaret herself lying on an old chest, wrapped in a clean white sheet.

Presently she woke and sat up on the bed, like one amazed. Seeing the men, she began to scream and cry for mercy.

This made Brower quite ashamed of his errand. He tried to explain that they meant no harm to her but were merely looking for Gerard. At this she cried out upon them.

'Cruel ; you know you have driven him away from me and from his friends. You are thieves ; you are not men of Sevenbergen or you would know better than to look for him here.'

Thus she went on, and the men got more and more uneasy, till at last Brower said hastily,

'Here, come away, men, before we hear worse. He is not here, and a woman's tongue is like a double-edged dagger !'

So they left Margaret and returned down the stairs. Martin was amazed to see them return without Gerard. He was certain they had taken him when he heard the screams. Now he lowered his bow, and looked bewildered at them.

'Why, mates, was the old fellow making ready to shoot at us ?' said Brower.

'Nonsense !' said Martin recovering his composure. 'I was but trying the new string on my bow.'

The men then told him that they had failed to find Gerard. Martin put on a log to the fire and they sat round talking, for the men wished to dry their wet clothes before returning home.

Suddenly from the direction of Margaret's room came a shriek, and then another and another, so wild and piercing that all sprang to their feet. One of them seized a candle and hastened to run up the steps. Martin tried to prevent him, but was immediately set upon and overpowered after a short struggle on the floor. They bound him hand and foot with a rope and Martin groaned aloud as he saw the man go up the stairs and could not now prevent him. Gerard would be taken after all!

CHAPTER 15

How Jorian did the lovers a good turn.

JORIAN, the man who had gone up the stairs, went straight to Margaret's room, and there, to his great surprise, he found the man they had all been in search of, pale and motionless, his head in Margaret's lap, and her kneeling over him, mute now, and still as a stone. Her eyes were staring, and she neither saw the light nor heard the man, nor cared for anything on earth but the white face in her lap.

Jorian stood awe-struck, the candle shaking in his hand. 'Why, where was he, then, all the time?'

Margaret heeded him not. Jorian went to the empty chest and inspected it. He began to understand.

Now the chest was really larger than it looked. It stood against the wall, but the wall had been hollowed out so that there was a space, as large again as the chest, opening out of it. Yet this could not be seen while the lid of the chest was shut.

Into this chest Margaret had put Gerard when they heard the men searching Peter's room; she had lain down on the closed lid, and deceived the men utterly. But alas! when danger was over and the men had gone downstairs and she opened the chest to congratulate Gerard on his lucky escape, there he lay, white and still, as one bereft of life. The men had been in the room several minutes, and the chest had been fast shut. There had not been sufficient air for him to breathe.

She dragged him out and over to the window and poured water upon his forehead in fruitless efforts to revive him. He was, it seemed, dead !

Then she had given way to this appalling sorrow. What need now of concealment ? In her agony she had shrieked aloud, and these were the shrieks that they had heard downstairs.

Jorian was quick to see what had happened. He was kind-hearted, and the sight of Margaret's grief touched him.

'This is a sorry sight,' said he ; 'it is a black night's work : all for a few parchments !'

He took a little mirror, and put it to Gerard's mouth and nostrils and held it there. When he withdrew it, it was dull.

'There is life in him !' said Jorian to himself. Margaret caught the words instantly, though only muttered, and it was as though a statue should start into life and passion. She rose and flung her arms round Jorian's neck.

'Oh, bless the tongue that tells me so !' and she clasped the great rough fellow again and again, eagerly.

'There ! let us lay him warm,' said Jorian ; and in a moment he raised Gerard and laid him on the bed-clothes. Then he took out a flask he carried, and filled his hand twice with the liquor and flung it sharply each time in Gerard's face. This seemed to revive him, he gave a faint sigh. Never was sound so joyful to human ears ! Margaret flew towards him, but then stopped, quivering for fear she should hurt him.

'That is right—let him alone,' said Jorian : 'he is sure to come all right. 'Tis not as if he were an old man.'

Jorian made for the door. In a moment Margaret threw herself in his way, and clasped his knees in supplication.

'You won't tell ? You have saved his life ; you have not the heart to undo your good work, and thrust him back to death ?'

'No, no !' said Jorian. 'It is not the first time I've done you two a good turn ; 'twas I who told you in the church whither we had to take him. Besides, what do I care for Brower ? But I wish you'd tell me where the parchments are ! There are a hundred crowns offered for them. That would be a little fortune for my wife and the children, you know.'

'Ah! they shall have those crowns,' promised Margaret.

'What! are the things in the house?' asked Jorian eagerly.

'No, but I know where they are. And I swear you shall have them to-morrow. Come to me for them when you will, but come alone.'

'I were mad, else. What! share the hundred crowns with Brower? And now may the bones rot in my skin if I let any one know the poor boy is here.'

He then ran off, lest by staying longer he should excite suspicion, and have them all after him.

And Margaret knelt, quivering from head to foot, and prayed beside Gerard, and for Gerard.

When Jorian returned to the others he answered their queries very shortly.

'What is to do? Why, we have scared the girl out of her wits. She was in a kind of fit.'

'We had better all go and doctor her, then.'

'Oh, yes! and frighten her worse. Her father is a doctor and I have roused him. Let us see the fire, will you?'

His careless way disarmed all suspicion. And soon the party agreed that the kitchen of the village inn was a warmer place than Peter's house, and they departed, having first untied Martin.

'I said we should be too late to catch him,' said Brower, as he went out of the door, 'and we were too late.'

Thus Gerard, in one terrible night, escaped the prison and the grave. And he escaped, not by his cunningly contrived hiding-place, nor by Margaret's ready wit, but by a good impulse in one of his captors, by a bit of human feeling left in a somewhat reckless fellow's heart, aided by his desire of gain. So mixed are human motives, so short-sighted our shrowdest counsels.

No words of a writer could convey one-half the happiness of Margaret and Gerard, as he awoke out of his trance. They knew, indeed, that they must part on the morrow. But that was nothing to them now. They had seen death face to face, and all other troubles seemed light as air. While there is life, there is hope; while there is hope, there is joy. They were both young, and loved one another dearly. We may imagine how they rejoiced at the escape from that great danger that had come upon them.

CHAPTER 16

The Burgomaster joins in the pursuit and suffers
for his eagerness.

MEANWHILE, there was another, who, that night, was not at all joyous, but extremely anxious.

The burgomaster was afraid of thunder and lightning ; or he would have made one of the party that searched Peter's house. He could not sleep for thinking of that search, and as soon as the storm was over, he crept downstairs, saddled his mule, and rode to the inn at Sevenbergen. There he found his men sleeping, some on the chairs, some on the tables, and some on the floor. He roused them furiously and heard the story of their unsuccessful search. He interrupted their account of how zealous they had been.

' Fool that I was ! ' cried the burgomaster, ' to let you go without me. Of course he was there all the time. Looked ye under the girl's bed ? '

' No, there was no room for a man there.'

' How know ye that if ye looked not ? ' snarled Ghysbrecht. ' Ye should have looked everywhere. Come now, get up and I will show you how to search.'

Brower got up and shook himself. ' If you find him call me a horse and no man,' said he.

In a few minutes Peter's house was again surrounded. The enraged burgomaster left his mule in the care of Jorian, and with Brower and the others entered the house.

They found it quite empty. Not even Peter was to be seen. But suddenly one of the men looked out of the upper window and gave a yell of triumph. There, a few fields off, they saw Gerard, quietly walking away with Margaret and Martin. The burgomaster and his men raced down the stairs ; he jumped on his mule, and they ran beside him in hot pursuit.

Now Gerard had risen before daybreak, warned by his recent peril to delay in Sevenbergen no longer. Martin undertook to guide him through the great forest that lay behind the house, and to set him upon a road that would lead him speedily out of Holland.

They had started, Martin with his bow, and Gerard with nothing but a stout stick Peter gave him for the journey. Peter had gone a little way with them, and after giving his parting blessing to the young man, turned back to his garden. The sun was just peeping above the tree-tops as they crossed a stony field in the direction of the wood. They were about half-way across, when Margaret looked round nervously, and uttered a cry, and following her instinct, began to run towards the wood, screaming with terror. Ghysbrecht and his men were coming on fast behind them.

Resistance would have been madness. Martin and Gerard followed her example. Martin shouted, 'Only get to the wood! And we are safe!' for he knew the pathless forest well, and in its tangled depths they might evade their pursuers. They had a good start, and were near the friendly wood. But the burgomaster was mounted and they were on foot. Spurring his beast to a gallop, he rode round in a semi-circle to cut them off. He gained the edge of the wood and came right in front of Gerard. The rest might escape for all he cared.

He had expected Gerard to try and dodge him. But in his ardour he had forgotten that hunted animals turn on the hunter, and that perhaps Gerard hated him as much as he hated Gerard.

With a savage cry Gerard sprang straight at him, and struck at him with all his might. The oak stick came down on the burgomaster's head with a fearful crash. He fell and lay at his mule's feet, his face streaming and his collar spattered with blood.

The next moment the three were in the wood. The yell of dismay and fury that burst from Ghysbrecht's men at that terrible blow which felled their leader, told the fugitives that it was now a race for life or death.

'Why run?' cried Gerard panting. 'You have your bow; and I have this.' And he shook his bloody staff.

'Boy!' cried Martin hoarsely; 'the gallows! follow me!' and he fled into the wood.

Soon they heard behind them the fierce cries of the men already in the wood. Margaret moaned and panted as she ran; Gerard clenched his teeth, and gripped his staff. The next minute they came to a thicker part of

the wood. Martin dashed into it, and shouldered the young wood aside as if it were standing corn.

Ere they had gone fifty yards in it they came to four paths. Martin took one. 'Bend low,' said he; and half-creeping, they glided along. Presently their path was intersected with other little winding paths. They took one of them; it seemed to lead back, but it soon turned, and presently they found themselves in a thick pine grove where the walking was firm and good; there were no paths here and the young fir-trees were so thick, you could not see three yards before your nose.

When they had gone some way in this, Martin sat down, and having learned in war to lose all sense of danger with the danger itself, he took a piece of bread out of his wallet and began quietly to eat his breakfast.

The young ones looked at him with dismay. He replied to their looks.

'All Sevenbergen could not find you now. I alone know the way in this part of the forest. But you will lose your purse, Gerard, long before you get to Italy; is that the way to carry a purse?'

Gerard looked, and there was a large triangular purse, entangled by its chains to the buckle and strap of his wallet.

'This is none of mine,' he said, and he cut it loose and opened it. There were a good many silver coins in it, but its bloated appearance was due to a number of pieces of brown paper folded and doubled. 'Why, it must be that old thief's, the burgomaster's! and see! stuffed with paper to deceive the world!'

Evidently it had become entangled with Gerard's wallet when the burgomaster fell from his mule as Gerard struck him.

Gerard was delighted. To fell his enemy and rob him at one blow seemed a great feat. But Margaret was uneasy and urged him to throw it away. The money was not his and she believed no good could come of an enemy's money.

But Gerard refused. 'This is spoil lawfully won in battle,' he said, and Martin, as an old soldier, agreed. So Gerard kept it.

They pursued their journey, Martin leading the way.

The farther they went, the more secure from pursuit they felt. Indeed, the townspeople never ventured so far into the trackless part of the forest.

Impetuous natures repent quickly. As soon as Gerard was out of danger he began to be sorry he had struck the burgomaster so hard.

'I saw his grey hairs as my stick fell on him,' he said.

But Martin was contemptuous of such scruples. 'The greyer your enemy is,' he declared, 'the older; and the older the craftier; and the craftier the better for a little killing.'

But Gerard was shocked at the thought that he might have killed the burgomaster. Martin only chuckled. 'Know you not,' he told Gerard, 'that a wise man never strikes his enemy but to kill him? Besides, if I were as old and useless as this Ghysbrecht, I'd thank the man who knocked me on the head!'

Gerard did not see the matter in this light, however, and refused to be comforted till Margaret pointed out to him that he had only struck at the burgomaster in self-defence. 'If then your enemy has fallen, it is through his own malice, not yours, and by the will of God.'

This cheered Gerard who was tender-hearted, but all the same, it was clear to all of them that now he must fly from Holland with haste. So they hurried on, but soon Martin thought he heard a sound behind them, and bade Margaret listen, for her ears were younger than his. Presently she heard a tuneful sound, like a single stroke upon a deep-ringing bell. She described it to Martin. Gerard heard it too. 'It is beautiful,' he said; 'It is a long way off. It is in front of us, is it not?'

'No no!' said Martin, 'the echoes of this wood confound the ears of a stranger. It comes from the pine grove we passed through.'

'Why, Martin, what is the matter?' asked both of them for the old man was pale and trembled.

'Come on!' he answered, 'let us find a better place than this.'

'Better?' asked Gerard, 'for what?'

'To stand at bay, Gerard,' said Martin gravely; 'and die like soldiers killing three for one.'

‘What is that sound?’

‘It is the avenger of blood!’

‘Oh, Martin, save him!’ cried Margaret. ‘What new mysterious peril is this?’

‘Girl, it’s a bloodhound!’

CHAPTER 17

Bloodhounds on the fugitive’s track through the forest.

MARTIN’S courage was perfect so far as it went. He had met and baffled many dangers in the course of his rude life, and these familiar dangers he could face with brave endurance; but he had never been hunted by a bloodhound, nor had he ever seen that brute’s unerring instinct baffled by human cunning. After going a few steps he leaned on his bow, and energy and hope died out of him. Gerard urged him to flight, but Martin replied sadly that flight could not help them.

‘They have taken the hound to where Ghysbrecht fell, and from the dead man’s blood to the man that shed it that cursed hound will lead them, though Gerard should run through an army, or swim a wide river.’

The hound’s mellow voice rang through the wood, but now they did not think of it as beautiful.

Strange that things beautiful should be terrible and deadly. The eye of the boa-constrictor while fascinating its prey is lovely. No royal crown holds such a jewel; it is like a ruby with the green light of the emerald within it. Yet the deer that sees it loses all power of motion, and trembles and awaits his death; even so this sweet and mellow sound seemed to fascinate Martin. He stood uncertain and bewildered. Gerard, too, was frightened. He had struck an old man and shed his blood, and by means of that very blood the avengers were now on his track. This was surely, he thought, the work of Heaven.

Margaret was thinking hard, and now she borrowed Martin’s knife, and without either of them seeing her, she drew the knife across her arm, and made it bleed freely; then stooping she smeared her shoes with the blood; the hound would thus be led astray, perhaps, from Gerard.

She cared not for herself if only he escaped. Then she roused Martin and Gerard, and urged them to come to some thicker part of the wood.

Martin led them in despair. He soon brought them to a thick hazel wood.

'We must get through this and wait on the other side; then as they come straggling through, shoot three, knock two on the head and the rest will kill us.'

At length they came out on the other side, and there the trees were large, but far apart, and no escape was possible that way.

Martin went down on his stomach and listened. 'I hear a horse's feet,' he said.

'No,' said Gerard. 'It is a mule's. That cursed Ghysbrecht is still alive; none other would follow me up so bitterly.'

'Never strike your enemy but to slay him,' said Martin gloomily.

'I'll hit harder this time, if Heaven gives me the chance,' said Gerard.

'There will be two hounds at least,' said Martin, as they took up their stand.

'Well,' said Gerard, 'I have made the track easy for the hounds, but rough to the men that we may deal with them apart. The hounds will come out first, and we must kill them, and then we shall be ready for the men. Or better, as soon as they are dead, let us go back into the wood again, right back.'

'That is a good thought,' said Martin and began to gain heart.

They could now hear the men in the wood. Martin stood with his bow ready at the edge, Gerard hid behind a tree a little distance off. 'The hounds will make towards me,' he told Martin, 'and as they come out shoot as many as you can, the rest will I knock over with my staff as they come round the tree.'

The shouting of the men came closer and they heard the twigs snapping. It was terrible waiting there for that hand-to-hand struggle. A trembling hand was laid on Gerard's shoulder. It made him start violently. It was Margaret.

'If we are forced to part company,' she said, 'make for that high ash-tree we came in by.'

‘Yes! yes! yes! but go back! don’t come here, out in the open!’

She ran back towards Martin; but, ere she could get to him, suddenly a huge hound burst out of the wood, and stood erect for a moment. Margaret cowered with fear but he never noticed her. Scent was to him what sight is to us. He lowered his nose an instant, and with an awful yell, sprang straight at Gerard’s tree, and rolled head-over-heels dead as a stone, spitted by an arrow that twanged from the bow of Martin.

That same moment out came another hound and smelt his dead comrade. Gerard rushed out at him, but ere he could use his staff, a streak of white lightning seemed to strike the hound and he fell in the dust, not killed, but wounded desperately.

Gerard had not time to strike him dead; the wood rustled with the near approach of the men. Pointing wildly to Martin to go back, Gerard ran a few yards to the right, then crept cautiously into the thick wood just as three men burst out.

Gerard crawled back almost on all-fours, while a little way off, but hidden from him, Margaret and Martin retreated in the same way. Thus, within a few yards of one another, pursued and pursuers were passing on opposite tracks.

A loud cry announced the discovery of the dead and the wounded hounds. Then followed a babble of voices as the men discussed the affair. The hunters were wasting time, and the hunted ones were making the most of it.

‘I hear no more hounds,’ whispered Martin to Margaret, and his courage came back to him.

But it was Margaret’s turn to tremble and despair. ‘Oh, why did we part with Gerard? They will kill my Gerard, and I not near him.’

‘Nay, nay, they are not clever enough. You bade him meet us at the ash-tree? We shall find him there.’

‘And so I did, Martin. To the ash-tree!’

‘Aye, but with less noise.’

They were now nearly at the edge of the thicket when suddenly they heard shouting behind them. The men had left the hounds and were beating back after them.

‘No matter,’ whispered Martin to his trembling com-

panion. 'We shall have time to get clear and slip out of sight by hard running. Ah!'

He stopped suddenly; for just as he was going to burst out of the brushwood he caught sight of a figure keeping sentinel. It was Ghysbrecht seated on his mule; a bloody bandage was across his nose, the bridge of which was broken; but over this his eyes peered keenly, and it was plain by their expression that he had heard the fugitives and was looking out for them.

Martin muttered a terrible oath, and cautiously strung his bow, and then, with equal caution, fitted his last arrow to the string. Margaret put her hands to her face, but said nothing. She saw this man must die, or her Gerard.

The bow was raised and the arrow drawn to its head, when at that moment an active figure leaped on Ghysbrecht from behind so swiftly that it was like a hawk swooping on a pigeon. A kerchief went over the burgomaster's head, in a turn of the hand his head was muffled in it, and he was whirled from his seat and fell heavily upon the ground, where he lay groaning with terror.

'Hist, Martin! Martin!' called Gerard.

Martin and Margaret both came out, crying 'Fly! fly! while they are all in the thicket; we are saved.'

At this crisis, when safety seemed at hand, as fate would have it, Margaret, who had borne up so bravely till now, began to succumb, partly from loss of blood.

'Oh, my beloved! fly!' she gasped! 'Leave me, for I am faint.'

'No,' cried Gerard. 'Death together, or safety! Ah! the mule! mount her, I'll run by the side.'

In a moment Martin was on Ghysbrecht's mule, and Gerard raised the fainting girl and laid her across the saddle, himself taking Martin's bow.

'Help! treason! murder!' shrieked Ghysbrecht, suddenly rising on his hams.

'Silence, cur!' roared Gerard, and trod him down again by the throat as men crush a snake.

'Now, have you got her firm?' he cried. 'Then fly! for our lives! for our lives!'

But even as the mule started, and Gerard removed his foot from Ghysbrecht's throat, Brower and his five men, who had come back for orders and heard the burgomaster's cries, burst shouting out of the coppice.

CHAPTER 18

The three friends escape once more. A sad parting.

THERE was something terrible in the yell of triumph with which these men burst out of the thicket on the fugitives, and the sharp cry of terror with which the latter darted away. Hardly a yard separated them ; but confused for a moment, like tigers that miss their spring, Brower and his men paused for a second, and the mule was ten yards away by the time they flew after them with uplifted weapons.

They were sure of catching them, for this morning they had seen their speed. But now conditions were changed. The old man of the party was mounted, and young Gerard was well able to keep up with the mule. Soon his good health and sober living began to give him the advantage ; the pursuers were not so young and active as he ; they soon puffed and snorted. Brower's forty years weighed him down like forty bullets. They came to rising ground, not steep but long, and here Brower himself was obliged to give up, tired out, and leave the pursuit to his men. One by one they also found the pace too much for them, so that very soon only one was left, but he kept on staunch as a bloodhound. Followed by him, Gerard and the mule came to a rise in a wood, shorter but much steeper than the last.

'Hand on mane !' cried Martin.

Gerard obeyed, and the mule helped him up the hill faster even than he was running before. At the sight of this Brower's man lost heart, and being now quite eighty yards behind the fugitives, he pulled up short, and taking down from his shoulder his cross-bow, he aimed it deliberately, and just as the trio were sinking out of sight over the crest of the hill, sent the bolt whizzing after them.

There was a cry of dismay ; and, next moment, as if a thunderbolt had fallen among them, they were lying on the ground, mule and all. The effect was so sudden that the shooter himself was stupefied for an instant. Then he called to his companions behind, and set off himself up the

hill ; but ere he reached half-way, up rose the figure of Martin with a bent bow in his hand. The man no sooner saw him in this attitude than he darted behind a tree. He knew well the skill of the old man with his bow, and had no mind to afford him a mark.

He peered cautiously round the tree, but there was the arrow's point still aimed at him. He saw it shine. He dared not move from his shelter.

After a few minutes he was joined by his comrades.

Then, with a scornful laugh, Martin vanished over the top of the hill, and they heard him riding off on his mule.

All the men ran up together. They saw in the distance Gerard and Margaret running along ; they looked like insects ; and Martin galloping after them as hard as he could.

The hunters were outwitted as well as outrun. The explanation of this mysterious happening was quite simple. By a strange coincidence the mule had put its foot in a rabbit-hole just at the moment when the cross-bow bolt flew harmlessly over its head ; it fell, and threw both Martin and Margaret, while their weight bore down Gerard, too, to the ground. But the mule was up again directly, and stood trembling. Martin was up, too, and looking round saw but one man in pursuit. He halted, then, and acted as we have seen, and made the young folk run on ahead.

He now galloped after his companions, and catching them up, put Gerard and Margaret on the mule, and ran beside them till his strength failed ; then they put him on the mule, and so took the running in turns. In this way they could keep up a great speed, and before they slackened, all sound and trace of them was hopelessly lost to Brower and his men. These went back crestfallen to look after their chief and the wounded bloodhound.

Thus after the excitement and horror of the last few hours, Gerard and Margaret were safe again. How good life and liberty seemed to them now ! We never value such things till we are in danger of losing them ; and then, by contrast, we see their real value.

But presently Gerard found stains of blood on Margaret's ankles.

' Martin ! Martin ! help ! ' he cried, ' they have wounded her with that cross-bow ! '

‘No, no!’ said Margaret, smiling to reassure him. ‘I am not wounded, nor hurt at all.’

‘But what is it, then?’ cried Gerard in great agitation.

‘Scold me not, then!’ said Margaret, blushing.

‘Did I ever scold you?’ said Gerard.

‘No, dear Gerard. Well then, Martin said it was blood those cruel dogs followed; so I thought, if I could but have a little blood on my shoes, the dogs would follow me instead, and let my Gerard go free. So I scratched my arm with Martin’s knife. Forgive me!’

Gerard was choked with emotion as he looked at the scratch. It seemed to him a deep cut. But Martin made light of it. As an old soldier he thought little of wounds and blood.

Margaret smiled with love. ‘Foolish Gerard!’ she murmured, ‘to make so much of nothing. As if I would not give all the blood in my heart for you, let alone a few drops!’

‘And I must part from her,’ groaned Gerard, ‘we two that love so dearly—one must be in Holland, one in Italy. Ah me! ah me!’

Suddenly they emerged upon a beaten path and Martin stopped. ‘This is the path I spoke of,’ said he, ‘and there lies the hostelry where you may get a guide to Germany.’

The time had come. Gerard took Martin aside, and said to him in a broken voice, ‘Good Martin, watch over her for me! She is mine; yet I must leave her. See, Martin! Here is gold; it was for my journey; it is no use my asking her to take it: she would not; but you will for her, will you not? Oh Heaven! And is this all I can do for her? Money? But poverty is a curse. You will not let her want for anything, dear Martin? The burgomaster’s silver is enough for me.’

‘Thou art a good lad, Gerard!’ said Martin; ‘neither want nor harm shall come to her. I care more for her little finger than for all the world; and were she naught to me, even for thy sake would I be a father to her. Go with a stout heart, and God be with thee going and coming back.’ And the rough soldier wrung Gerard’s hand and turned his head away with unwonted feeling.

After a moment’s silence he was for going back to Margaret, but Gerard stopped him. By this means Gerard

escaped a witness of his anguish at leaving her he loved, and Martin escaped a piteous sight. He did not see their sorrowful farewell to one another, but he heard Gerard groan and Margaret sob. At last there was a hoarse cry, and Martin looked up and saw Gerard running away down the road, with both hands clasped above his head in prayer, and Margaret tottering back towards him with hands extended piteously, her eyes dull with weeping. Martin met her and spoke words of comfort to her; but her mind could not take them in. He put her on his mule and held her tight there, and so took her home sadly and slowly.

She did not shed one tear nor say one word. At the edge of the wood he took her off the mule, and bade her go across to her father's house. She did as she was bid.

Martin himself went to Rotterdam. Sevenbergen was too dangerous for him after recent events.

CHAPTER 19

The exile reaches the German frontier.

AFTER parting from Margaret Gerard went all sorrowful like one in a dream. He hired a horse and a guide at the little inn and rode swiftly towards the German frontier. But he took no notice of things around him, and twice his guide spoke to him and he answered not a word.

After many hours' riding they came to the brow of a steep hill, and here the guide halted, and pointing across the valley cried 'There is Germany'.

Gerard dismounted, paid for his horse in silence, and descended the hill alone. At the bottom was a little stream. In its sparkling waters he washed his feet and bathed his head. This awakened him. He rose, and taking a run, leaped across the brook into Germany. Even as he touched the strange land he turned suddenly and looked back.

'Farewell, ungrateful country!' he cried; 'But for Margaret it would cost me little to leave you for ever. Farewell, fatherland, and welcome the wide world! Every land is a home to the brave man!'

And with these brave words in his mouth he dropped.

suddenly with arms and legs all weak, and sat down weeping bitterly upon the foreign soil.

When he had sat thus a little while bowed down in grief at leaving his native land and her whom he loved, he rose and dashed the tears from his eyes like a man; and not casting a single glance behind him to weaken his heart, he stepped out into the wide world.

His love and heavy sorrow left no room in him for fear. Compared with rending himself from Margaret, it seemed a small thing to go on foot to Italy in that rude age.

All along the way to Italy he knew there would be found communities of monks living in monasteries, as they were called; at these houses all travellers were welcome if they were men of peace and honest: and, thanks to the instruction of his friends, the monks at Tergou, and his own thirst for knowledge, he could speak most of the languages needed on that long road. He said to himself, 'I will soon be at Rome: the sooner the better, now.'

So Gerard set forth on his journeys and met with many adventures, some of them pleasant enough and some far otherwise, of which you shall hear.

CHAPTER 20

A poor night's lodging at an unsavoury inn.

GERARD had gone some miles along the road to the south when he came upon a little group by the wayside. Two men in sober-coloured suits stood leaning lazily on each side of a horse, talking to one another. The rider, in a silk doublet and bright green coat, lay flat on his stomach in the afternoon sun, and looked like an enormous lizard. His velvet cloak of flaming yellow was carefully spread over the horse's loins.

'Is aught amiss?' inquired Gerard.

'Not that I know of,' replied one of the servants.

'But your master, he lies like a corpse. Are ye not ashamed to let him lie thus on the ground?'

'Oh, the bare ground is the best cure for his disorder.'

If you get sober in bed it gives you a headache ; but you are up from the hard ground after a good sleep like a bird.'

'What, is the gentleman drunk ?'

The servants burst into a hoarse laugh at the simplicity of Gerard's question. But suddenly one of them stopped, and eyeing him all over, said very gravely, 'Who are you, and where born, that know not the count is ever drunk at this hour ?' and Gerard found himself suspected.

'I am a stranger,' said he, 'but a true man and one that loves knowledge ; therefore do I ask questions, and not for love of prying.'

'If you be a true man,' said one of them, 'give us a reward for the knowledge we have given you.'

Gerard was dismayed at this request for money, but he promised them some, if they would tell him why they had put the cloak over the horse and not over the master.

Under the inspiring influence of coming coin, two answers were immediately given him. The one was that at any moment the count might wake up from his drunken slumbers, and if he did so and found his horse standing sweating in the cold while a cloak lay idle at hand, he would start beating them for lazy servants ; the other was that a horse is a poor creature and takes cold readily, while a man who is drunk has a store of inward heat from the strong liquor, that warms him to the skin. Why, therefore, waste a cloak on him ?

Each of the speakers fell in love with his own theory of the matter, and soon their voices rose so high in dispute that the human lizard on the ground began to growl instead of snoring ; but in their heat they did not notice this.

Ere long the argument took a turn that sooner or later was pretty sure to enliven a discussion in that age. One servant, holding the bridle with his right hand, gave the other a blow with his left ; he returned it, and soon they were striking at one another over the horse's mane. The horse naturally became uneasy, and stepping backward between them, trod on the back of the lord. He started up howling, clapped one hand to his sore back, and with the other drew his sword ; the servants, amazed with terror, let the horse go ; he galloped off, the men in pursuit of him, crying out with fear, and the green noble after them, shouting out curses at them and waving his sword.

Gerard watched them and then turned his back and went on calmly south, glad to have saved the four farthings he had got ready to meet the men's demand.

Now the sun was nearly setting, and Gerard looked about for an inn, but none could he see. To make matters worse, black clouds gathered over the sky. He quickened his pace. But it was useless: down came the rain in torrents, drenched the bewildered traveller, and seemed to extinguish the very sun. Gerard wearily went on in this unknown region, dark and wet.

He was entering a great wood when the darkness thickened. Huge branches sometimes obstructed the narrow road, and Gerard stumbled along with shivering limbs, empty stomach, and fainting heart till the wolves rose from their lairs and bayed all round the wood. There was no wind, and his excited ear heard light feet patter at times over the fallen leaves, and low branches rustle with creatures gliding swiftly past them.

But Gerard grasped his cudgel and prepared to fight hard for his life if he were attacked. Presently in the great darkness before him he caught sight of a welcome light. 'A candle,' he cried, and began to run towards it. It was more distant than at first appeared; but at last, in the very heart of the forest, he found a house with lighted candles, and heard loud voices inside it. He looked up to see if there was a signboard to mark it as an inn, but there was none. 'Not an inn, after all,' said he sadly. 'No matter; no one would turn a dog out into the wood to-night,' and with this he opened the door and looked in, but speedily drew back as if struck in the face.

He had peeped into a large, but low room, the middle of which was filled by a huge stove, or clay oven; round this, wet clothes were drying, some on lines, and some still upon their rustic owners; the smell of the steam arising from them was horrible.

In one corner of the room was a travelling family, the children dirty and neglected. The smell of garlic was added to the others. The window was closed, and the stove gave out an intense heat, and over forty people were breathing the air of the room.

Now Gerard, like most artistic people, was very sensitive, and the strong smell that pervaded the room struck

dismay into his heart. But the rain lashed him outside : the light and the fire tempted him in.

He could not force his way all at once through the varied perfumes ; but he returned to the light again and again like a moth. Odour of family predominated in the corners, stewed rustic reigned supreme in the centre, and garlic in the noisy group by the window. Gerard crept into a corner close to the door, and after he had accustomed himself to the foul atmosphere, being faint with hunger, asked one of the men whether this was not an inn after all ?

‘ Whence come you that you know not “ The Star of the Forest ” ’ ? was the reply.

Gerard explained that he was a stranger and that, in his country, inns always had a sign. This amused the man very much, and when Gerard asked for the landlord and was shown a middle-aged woman seated on the other side of the fire, the news went round that a stranger of extreme ignorance had come in, and Gerard found all the people in the room staring at him as if he were some strange animal.

Gerard went up to the landlady and asked if he could have some supper. She opened her eyes with astonishment.

‘ Supper is over an hour ago,’ she said.

Gerard told her he was a stranger and belated in the wood, but the woman answered :

‘ What have I to do with that ? All the world knows that “ The Star of the Forest ” sups from six to eight. Come before six, ye sup well ; come before eight, ye sup as Heaven pleases ; come after eight, ye get a clean bed, and a cup of milk at dawn.’

Gerard looked blank, and asked if he might go to bed then.

‘ The beds are not come yet,’ replied the landlady : ‘ you will sleep when the rest do. Inns are not built for one.’

Gerard could not understand what she meant by ‘ The beds are not come yet,’ but his previous questions had amazed the people so much that he was afraid to ask any more, and was going back to his corner when he saw a woman beckoning him. She belonged to one of the families in the corner, and Gerard went up to her in wonder at what she could want. She brought out from a bundle on the floor

a small tin plate and a dried pudding, and gave them to Gerard.

'Put it in the stove,' she said; 'you are too young to lie down fasting. And never mind these people; they know no better, born and bred in a wood.'

Gerard thanked her warmly and, going up to the stove asked the landlady if he might put the pudding inside to warm. This question was evidently another surprise, but she said 'Why not?' and made way for him to the stove by pushing and pulling aside the stolid rustics who were scorching all round it.



'Turn about is fair play,' she said to them. 'Ye have been dry this ten minutes and better.'

Gerard baked his pudding and was much enjoying the eating of it when the door flew open, and in came a bundle of straw, thrown on to the floor by one of the servants. Another and another came after it till the room's floor was covered with clean straw. The beds had come.

The guests were not slow to lie down and start snoring. Gerard saw that the first arrivals at the inn claimed the places nearest the stove. He himself went to his corner, thankful to have a little air and space. The landlady wished the company good-night and went out.

Soon they were all asleep, and Gerard's body lay on the straw in this rough German inn while he dreamt of Sevenbergen.

When he woke in the morning he found nearly all his fellow guests gone. One or two were waiting for dinner at nine o'clock ; it was now six. He paid the landlady her bill, amounting to about an English halfpenny, and gave a trifling coin to the servant who had brought in the bedding. He, in gratitude, allowed Gerard to drink from a great pail of milk just fresh from the cow.

At the door Gerard found the woman who had given him the pudding, with her husband, and thanked her, and according to the spirit of the age, offered money. But she would take none.

'We are travellers and strangers as you are, and bound to feel for those in like plight.'

Then Gerard stammered his excuses. 'A blessing go with you both, good people,' said he.

'And God speed you, young man !' replied the honest couple ; and with that they parted, and never met again.

CHAPTER 21

Gerard falls in with a cheerful travelling companion.

THE sun had just risen ; the raindrops on the leaves glittered like diamonds. The air was fresh, and Gerard stepped gaily along the road. Last night he had felt miserable and wanted to return to Holland, but now he had forgotten all his troubles in the bright morning.

Twenty miles he walked that day, and towards sunset came upon a huge building with an enormous arched gateway.

'A monastery,' he cried joyfully. 'I go no further lest I fare worse.' He applied at the gate, and on stating whence he came and whither he was bound, was instantly admitted and directed to the guest-chamber, a large and lofty room, where travellers were fed and lodged free of charge by the charity of the monks.

At supper plain but good food and beer, brewed in the

monastery, were set before him and his fellows, and at an early hour they were taken into a large dormitory or sleeping room, and each had a bed covered with sheepskins.

In the morning the monks, finding out that he had been instructed in a monastery and was going alone to Rome, were very kind to him and made him stay and dine with them. They also pricked out for him on a piece of parchment the route that he should follow, and the prior, or chief monk among them, gave him a silver coin to help him on the way, and advised him to join some honest company and not travel alone, facing the manifold dangers of the way.

Gerard had not found any dangers yet, and started off again merrily.

That evening he came to a small town where there was but one inn. He knocked loudly on the great oak door, and shouted, but no one opened the door or answered. After a while he shouted louder, and at last a little round window or, rather, hole in the wall, opened, and a man's head protruded cautiously, like a tortoise's from its shell, and eyed Gerard stolidly but never uttered a word.

'Is this an inn?' asked Gerard.

The head seemed to ponder; eventually it nodded lazily.

'Can I have food and rest here?'

Again the head pondered, and ended by nodding sullenly.

'Then how am I to get in?' asked Gerard.

At this the head popped in as though the last question had shot it, and a hand popped out, pointed round the corner of the building, and slammed the window. Gerard followed the indication, and discovered a small low door. The front door was always kept locked, apparently, for fear of thieves. He soon found the principal room, in the centre of which was a large stove, and beside this he sat down with a few other travellers and waited for some sign that supper was being prepared.

When an old attendant came in, Gerard asked him when supper would be ready.

'When I see thrice as many here as now.'

Gerard groaned, and the man turned on him saying:

'Inns are not built for one ; if you can't wait for the rest, look out for another lodging.' Gerard sighed, and at this the man frowned and went out.

After a while people began to come in till fully eighty were assembled. The men kicked the mud off their shoes and left it on the floor, and the dirt all over the room annoyed Gerard.

When water was brought in, Gerard eagerly went to it, but at the sight of it, lost his temper, and said to the servant, 'First wash your water, and then a man may wash his hands !'

To which he received the old answer, 'If you don't like it, seek another inn !'

Gerard said nothing but went courteously and besought an old traveller to tell him how far it was to the next inn.

'About twelve miles,' was the reply.

Then Gerard appreciated the remark of the servant.

That worthy now returned with an armful of wood and counting the travellers, put on a log for every six, by which method, the hotter the room, the more heat he added.

After a long wait table-cloths were brought in, but oh, so brown, so dirty, and so coarse, they seemed like sacks ! Brought up in clean Holland, Gerard had never seen such cloths before, and could not restrain a faint cry.

'What is the matter ?' inquired a traveller.

Gerard pointed. The other looked at the cloth but saw nothing to grumble at.

A Burgundian soldier came peeping over Gerard's shoulder, and seeing what was amiss, laughed loudly, then slapped him on the back and cried in French, 'Courage ! the devil is dead !'

Gerard stared ; he did not see what that statement had to do with the case, but the tones were so hearty and the soldier's face, notwithstanding a grim beard, was so gay and genial that he smiled and talked with him. As soon as the soldier found that Gerard could speak French, he started a long description of the wars he had fought in, using at intervals many strange oaths, and this curious saying of his.

Presently in came the servant and counted the company, then went out again and returned with a wooden plate and spoon for each.

Then there was an interval, after which he brought them a long mug apiece made of glass, and frowned. By and by he stalked gloomily in with a hunch of bread for each of them. Expectation thus aroused, the guests sat for nearly an hour, till, with pomp, was brought in a huge pot of thin soup with square pieces of bread in it. This, though not agreeable to the mind, served to fill the stomach. Several courses of food followed, all distasteful but filling; then when the meal had lasted an hour and more, and the French and Dutch were full to the brim, in came



excellent fish and other dishes of delicate flavour. Gerard was very angry, but he had satisfied his hunger with the first courses, and could eat no more. The cunning natives had kept a corner empty for what might come, and Gerard had to watch them enjoying the rest of the dinner.

The soldier, too, was much disturbed in mind at being outwitted thus by the Germans, whom he despised, but he drank copiously of the beer that was now brought in, and joined loudly in the conversation, though as he could not speak German, his usual remark was 'Courage! the devil is dead!'

After dinner was finished in came the servant holding in

his hand a wooden dish with circles and semicircles marked on it in chalk. He put it down on the table, and stood silent and sad. Then every one began to search pockets and pouches, and each threw a coin into the dish. Gerard timidly said that he had drunk no beer, and inquired how much less he was to pay than the others.

‘What mean you?’ said the man roughly. ‘Whose fault is it you have not drunk? You will pay no more than the rest and no less.’ Gerard was abashed.

The bedrooms were upstairs, with nothing in them but a bed. They were small and gloomy and Gerard found that he had to share his room with a big man with a black beard. The fellow seemed honest enough, but he would sit on the edge of his bed and talk, till at last Gerard put his fingers into his ears and lay down to sleep in spite of his chatter. At peep of day Gerard rose and went out in search of fresh air.

A cheerful voice hailed him in French: ‘What ho! you are up with the sun, comrade!’

‘He rises early that sleeps in a dog’s lair,’ answered Gerard crossly.

‘Courage, friend, the devil is dead!’ was the instant reply. The soldier then told him that his name was Denys, and he was passing from Flushing to the Duke’s French dominions; the change was agreeable to him, as he should revisit his native place and see again all his old friends. He asked Gerard who he was and whither he was going.

‘My name is Gerard and I am going to Rome,’ said the more reserved Hollander, but Denys was not to be put off in this way. He proposed that they should journey together.

Gerard was suspicious. ‘“A good wolf is a bad companion,”’ quoted he, ‘and soldiers are near akin to wolves, they say.’

‘They lie,’ said Denys; ‘besides, here is another proverb, “Wolves do not eat one another,” and a good soldier never pillages his comrade. Come, young man, too much suspicion becomes not your years. They who travel should learn to read faces: I think you might have seen good faith in mine since I have seen it in yours. Is it yon fat purse at your girdle you fear for?’ (Gerard turned pale.) ‘Look here!’ and he undid his belt and poured out of it two handfuls of gold pieces, then returned them to their hiding-

place. 'There is a hostage for you,' said he; 'carry you that, and let us be comrades,' and handed him his belt, gold and all.

Gerard stared. 'If I am over prudent, you are not prudent enough.' But he flushed and looked pleased at the other's trust in him.

'Bah! I can read faces; and so must you, or you'll never bring your bones safe to Rome.'

'Soldier, you would find me a dull companion, for my heart is heavy,' said Gerard yielding.

'Oh, no one is sad beside me. I cheer them all with my watchword, "Courage, every one! the devil is dead!"'

'So be it then!' said Gerard; 'but take back your belt for I don't trust by halves. We will go together as far as the Rhine, and God go with us both!'

'Amen!' said Denys, and lifted his cap in reverence at the name of God.

CHAPTER 22

The friends have a narrow escape from bears in the forest.

ALL that day they walked steadily on, and Denys enlivened the weary way. He chattered about battles and sieges and things that were new to Gerard; he passed nobody without a word or two. 'They don't understand it, but it wakes them up,' said he.

Towards nightfall they reached a small village and found a house with barn and stables, which was the only inn. Gerard asked for supper.

'Supper? we have no time to cook for travellers; we only provide lodging.'

'Madman, who, born in Holland, sought other lands!' exclaimed Gerard indignantly in Dutch.

The landlady started.

'What is that?' asked she in alarm. 'You can buy what you like in the village, and cook it here; but, I pray you, mutter no charms or sorceries here, good man.'

They searched the village for food, and supped on roasted eggs and brown bread.

At an early hour a rosy-checked old man came with a lanthorn to show them their beds. He led them across a dirty yard and brought them into a cow-house. There on each side of every cow was laid a little clean straw and a tied bundle of straw for a pillow. Gerard was astonished.

‘What! sleep with the cows?’ he asked.

‘Well, it is hard on the poor beasts. They have scarce room to turn,’ said the old man.

‘Oh, it is not hard on us, then?’ said Gerard.

‘Where is the hardship?’ said the old man. ‘Look at me! I am fourscore, and never had an ache or pain all my life, because I have always slept among the kine. Believe me, their breath is sweeter than man’s!’ and he went out.

So Denys and Gerard lay down in the straw, one on each side of the cow. But Gerard was not sleepy and complained that they had no coverings and would be very cold before morning.

‘Burrow in the straw, then,’ said Denys. ‘You must be very new to this world if you grumble at this. How would you like to lie on the field of battle on a frosty night, as I did the other day, naked, with nothing to keep me warm but the carcass of a fellow I had killed?’

‘Horrible! horrible! Tell me all about it!’

‘Well, we had a little battle in Brabant, and won a little victory, but it cost us dear; several men turned up their toes, and I among them.’

‘Killed, Denys? Come now!’

‘Dead as mutton. Stuck full of spear-holes till the blood ran out of me like the juice out of grapes when you squeeze them! Some of those vagabonds that strip the dead soldier on the field of battle came and took every rag off me; they did me no further harm because there was no need.’

‘No! you were dead.’

‘Of course. This must have been at sunset; and with the night came a keen frost that froze the blood on my wounds and stopped all the rivulets that were running from my heart, and about midnight I woke as from a trance. I saw I could not live the night through without cover. All round I could hear the groans of the wounded; at last one of them suddenly ceased groaning. ‘You are gone,’ said I, so made up to him, and true enough he was dead, but warm, you know. I took him in my arms: but

was too weak to carry him ; so I rolled with him into a ditch close by ; there my comrades found me in the morning, hugging a dead Fleming for the bare life.'

Gerard shuddered. 'And this is war ; this is the chosen theme of poets and minstrels. Truly a fine thing for those who have never tried it !' In the morning Gerard was awakened by a liquid hitting his eye : it was Denys employing the cow's udder as a squirt.

'Oh, shame !' cried Gerard, 'to waste the good milk !' and he took a horn out of his wallet. 'Fill this ! But I do not see what right we have to meddle with her milk at all.'

'Make your mind easy !' replied Denys ; 'Last night she ate my pillow !'

Gerard laughed heartily.

'On waking', said Denys, 'I had to hunt for my head and found it in the stable gutter. She ate our pillow from us, we drink our pillow from her,' and he bowed low to the cow.

'That old man was right though,' said Gerard ; 'never have I risen so refreshed since I left my native land. Henceforth let us shun inns, and always sleep in a monastery or a cow-house.'

As their journey continued, however, Gerard learned in time to accept the inevitable and to imitate the cheerful endurance of his comrade, whom he looked upon as almost superhuman for hardihood of body and spirit. One day about noon they reached a town of some size, and Gerard was glad, for he wanted to buy a pair of shoes ; his own were quite worn out.

They soon found a shop that displayed many shoes, but when they would have entered, they found the doorway blocked by the fat shopkeeper, who was asleep.

Denys and Gerard stood and looked at this shopkeeper who kept out his own customers.

'What is the matter ?' inquired a mumbling voice from the shop. It was the apprentice, with his mouth full, eating his dinner.

'We want to get into your shop ?'

'What for ?'

'Shoes !'

The anger of the apprentice was aroused at such an explanation. 'And could ye find no hour out of the twelve

to come bothering us for shoes but the one little hour when my master takes his sleep and I sit down to my dinner ?'

Denys heard but could not understand the German. He proposed to give the fellow a dig in the ribs with his knife. Gerard was alarmed at this, for he knew that in any brawl all the townsfolk would combine against them.

Luckily Denys could not carry out his threat, for just then two people came up and without a word kicked the shopkeeper in the back, fully woke him, and went in to buy shoes. Finally, Gerard bought his shoes from the unwilling shopkeeper. Denys would not buy from such surly people, though his shoes too were worn down.

So they passed through many villages and walked on day after day. As they drew near the Rhine their way lay through many forests, and now for the first time they heard of thieves and robbers on the road before them. The rustics were said to have a custom, hereabouts, of murdering the unwary traveller in these gloomy woods, and certainly every one they met carried a light axe. These axes the natives threw with wonderful accuracy, and Gerard bought one and practised with it.

Denys saw to it that the bolts of his crossbow were sharp, and used to unsling it from his shoulder and carry it ready whenever they entered a wood.

One day, in a forest, Gerard was walking along, thinking of his home and Margaret, when his companion laid a hand on his shoulder. 'Hush !' he said, in a low whisper, and Gerard started. Gerard grasped his axe tight and shook a little ; he heard a rustling in the wood, and at the same moment Denys sprang forward and put his crossbow to his shoulder even as he jumped. 'Twang !' went the string, and after a moment's suspense, he roared, 'Run forward, guard the road, he is hit, he is hit !'

Gerard darted forward, and as he ran a young bear burst out of the wood right upon him ; it went up on its hind legs with a snarl, and though not half grown, opened fearful jaws and long claws. Gerard in a fury of excitement flung himself on it, and delivered a tremendous blow on its nose with his axe. The creature staggered ; another, and it lay stretched with Gerard hacking it.

'Hallo ! stop !' cried Denys, 'it is dead now.'

'I took it for a robber,' said Gerard, panting.

' Aye,' replied Denys, ' these chattering travellers have made you think of nothing but robbers and assassins ; they have not a real live robber in their whole nation. Nay, I'll carry the beast ; bear thou my cross-bow.'

' We will carry it by turns,' said Gerard, ' for 'tis a heavy load ; poor thing, how its blood drips. Perhaps it has a mother that will miss it sorely this night, and loves it as ours love us.'

Denys said that the bear's mother was probably dead long ago, and the skin at the tanners, but Gerard was really sorry they had killed the bear. ' Why, then,' said he, ' we have killed one of God's creatures that was all alone in the world—as I am this day, in a strange land.'

Denys laughed at him, and said that these things must not be looked at so, or not another bow would be drawn in forest or battle-field. He declared that Gerard was too gentle, and would never get safely to Rome by himself alone.

As they walked on talking thus Gerard heard a sound behind them. It was a peculiar sound, too, like something heavy, but not hard, rushing over the dead leaves. He turned round with some little curiosity. An enormous creature was coming down the road at about sixty paces' distance !

It was a bear as big as a large horse, tearing along with its huge head down, running hot on the scent.

The very moment he saw it Denys said in a whisper, ' The cub ! '

Oh, the horror of that one word, whispered hoarsely with frightened eyes ! In a moment it all flashed upon them like a sudden stroke of lightning in the dark—the bloody trail, the murdered cub, the mother upon them and—death ! All this in one moment. The next, she saw them. She raised her big head, her jaws opened wide at them, her eyes turned to blood and flame, and she rushed upon them.

' Shoot ! ' screamed Denys to Gerard, who had the cross-bow, but he stood shaking from head to foot.

' Too late ! ' shouted Denys. ' Tree ! tree ! ' and he dropped the cub, pushed Gerard across the road, and flew to the first tree and climbed it, while Gerard did the same on his side. As they fled, both men uttered inhuman howls like savage creatures grazed by death.

With all their speed one or other would have been torn

to fragments before reaching his tree, had not the bear stopped a moment at the cub. Without taking her blood-shot eyes off those she was hunting, she smelt it all round, and found that it was quite dead. She gave a terrific howl, and flew after Denys, then reared and struck at him as he climbed. He was just out of reach.

Instantly she seized the tree and, with her huge teeth, tore a great piece out of it. Then she reared again, dug her claws deep into the bark, and began to mount it slowly, but as surely as a monkey.

Denys, by evil chance, had climbed a dead tree, a mere trunk of no great height. He climbed faster than his pursuer and was soon at the top. He looked this way and that for another tree to which he could spring. There was none. If he jumped down, he knew the bear would be upon him ere he could run away.

But Denys was not used to turn his back on danger.

'My hour is come,' thought he, 'let me meet death like a man.'

He kneeled down and grasped a small branch to steady himself, drew his long knife and prepared to stab at the great brute as soon as it should mount within reach. Of this combat the result could scarcely be doubtful.

The bear's head and neck could not be hurt for the masses of hair upon them. The man was going to sting the bear, and the bear would crack the man like a nut.

Gerard's heart was better than his nerves. He saw his friend's danger, and blind rage took the place of his fear. He slipped down his tree, picked up the cross-bow he had left on the road, and discharged a bolt up at the bear. The bear gave a snarl of rage and pain, and turned its head.

'Keep away!' cried Denys, 'or you are a dead man!'

'I care not!' shouted Gerard, madly, and shot another bolt at the bear.

The bear, finding this foe behind her, slipped growling down the tree. Gerard ran back to his tree and climbed it swiftly, but even as he did so, the bear struck up at him, and her fore paw tore his leg. He climbed and climbed, and presently he heard a voice, as it were in the air, say, 'Go out on the bough!' He looked and saw a massive bough growing out almost at right angles. He worked out and along it to the end, and then looked round panting.

The bear was mounting the tree on the other side. She passed the bough and went up higher, her sight not being keen; but scent told her she was wrong, and down she



came again. Slowly and cautiously she tried the bough and found it sound, then crawled along it, growling as she came.

Gerard looked down. The ground was forty feet below—death if he jumped. And death was moving along the bough towards him in horrible form.

He thought of his home, of Rome, of Margaret.

The bear crawled nearer.

Gerard saw the terrible jaws and bloodshot eyes coming upon him as in a mist. Then, as if in a dream, he heard the twang of the bow. Denys, with white face, below, was shooting at the bear.

The bear snarled, but still crawled on. Again the cross-bow twanged, and the next moment the bear was close upon Gerard, where he sat with hair stiff on end and eyes staring in terror. The bear opened her jaws, and the hot blood spouted from them upon his face. The bough shook. The wounded monster was reeling; it clung and stuck its claws deep into the wood; it toppled, its claws held firm, but the body rolled off, and the sudden shock threw Gerard forward on his face. The bear raised up her head in a last struggle, and the awful jaws snapped together close to him with a last effort of baffled hate. Then the bear fell with a tremendous crash to the ground.

Denys, from below, gave a shout of triumph, and immediately after, a cry of dismay; for Gerard had swooned, and without an attempt to save himself, rolled headlong from the perilous height.

CHAPTER 23

Breakfast with a ghastly company.

DENYS caught at Gerard and checked his fall; but it may be doubted whether this alone would have saved him from breaking his neck or a limb. His best friend now was the dying bear, on whose hairy carcass his head and shoulders descended. Denys tore him off her, but it was needless, for though she still panted, and her limbs quivered, she was quite harmless. Denys propped Gerard up against her warm body, and fanned his face. He came out of his faint slowly, and feeling the bear all round him, rolled away with a yell.

‘Courage!’ cried Denys, ‘the devil is dead!’

‘Is it dead? quite dead?’ inquired Gerard from behind a tree, for his courage was sorely shaken now.

Denys showed him that the bear was dead by pulling its ears, and opening its jaws, and laughed at Gerard.

‘Why faint?’ he asked.

‘She sent her nasty blood all over me. I think the smell must have overpowered me.’

Denys laughed at him for being upset by blood, and Gerard retorted that he had seen the other’s face white with fear under the tree.

‘Let us distinguish,’ said Denys, colouring: ‘it is permitted to tremble for a friend.’

Gerard, for answer, flung his arms round Denys’s neck in silence.

After a rest, they began to move on, and then Denys noticed Gerard’s wound. ‘He is wounded!’ he exclaimed in dismay.

‘Be calm, Denys. I am not touched, I feel no pain.’

‘You? you only feel pain when another is hurt,’ cried Denys, with great emotion, and bent down to examine Gerard’s leg.

‘Quick!’ he cried, ‘before it stiffens,’ and hurried him on.

Ere they had walked far, the muscles of the wounded leg stiffened, till Gerard could not put his foot to the ground without great pain. At last he could bear it no longer, and said he must lie down. This was serious, for night was coming on. However, Denys helped him aside into the wood, and to his surprise gave him his cross-bow and bolts, and bade him shoot any ill-looking fellows who tried to interfere with him, if they refused to move off. ‘Honest men keep the path,’ said he. Then he set off running up the road they had come by.

Gerard lay aching and smarting. After about two hours he heard shouts, and an arrow struck a tree close by and quivered in it. Several missiles rattled among the boughs, and the wood echoed with battle-cries. Presently he heard the fierce galloping of hoofs, and still louder shouts arose, and strange and terrible sounds like claps of thunder; red tongues of flame shot ever and anon among the trees, and clouds of smoke came drifting over his head; then all was still. Gerard was struck with awe.

When Denys came back about sunset, Gerard saw he was carrying the bear's skin. He welcomed him joyously, and asked how he had escaped from the battle. Denys had heard nothing, and would not believe Gerard's story. He thought it was a fancy bred by fever.

Then Gerard showed him the arrow in the tree, and Denys was forced to admit that there must have been a battle after all. 'But,' said he, 'tis no business of mine, for my duke has no quarrel hereabouts; so let's to bed;' and he scraped together a heap of leaves, and made Gerard lie on it; he then lay down beside him, his cross-bow under his hand, and drew the bear-skin over them, hair inward. They were soon quite warm and fast asleep.

But long before the dawn Gerard woke his comrade.

'What shall I do, Denys, I die of hunger?'

'Do? why, go to sleep again at once. He who sleeps, sups.'

'But I tell you I am too hungry to sleep,' said Gerard angrily.

'Let us march then,' said Denys, and after a few yawns he cut off the bear's ears, and they took the road.

Gerard leaned on his axe, and propped by Denys on the other side, hobbled along, not without sighs of pain. It was a clear starlight night, and soon the moon rose and they saw the end of the wood. At the outskirts they came to something so mysterious that they stopped to gaze at it, before drawing nearer. Two white pillars rose in the air, distant a few paces from each other; and between them stood many figures that looked like human forms.

'I go no farther till I know what this is,' said Gerard in an anxious whisper. 'Are these images for men to pray to, or live robbers waiting to shoot down honest travellers? nay, living men they cannot be, for they stand on nothing that I see. Oh Denys, let us turn back till daybreak!'

Denys halted, and peered long and keenly.

'They are men,' said he at last, 'but men that will never hurt us nor we them. Look not at their feet, but over their heads.'

Looking, Gerard presently discerned the outline of a dark wooden beam passing from pillar to pillar, and as they came nearer they saw one by one in the moonlight snake-like

cords hanging from the beam, each tied to the neck of a dead man. Now, as they came near this awful monument of crime and vengeance, a light air swept by ; several of the corpses swung and swayed, and every rope creaked. Gerard shuddered at this ghastly salute.

So thoroughly had their attention been fixed upon the gibbet and its load of corpses that it was but now they perceived a fire right underneath, and a living figure sitting beside it. His axe lay by him, the bright blade shining red in the glow. He was asleep.

Denys and Gerard went up to the fire, and the prudent Gerard seized the man's axe and sat down firmly on it, grasping his own and examining the sleeper. He could not understand why the man had chosen such a place for his slumbers.

Denys took out the bear's ears and began to toast them over the fire. 'Though,' he said, 'it will be eating money, for the mayor of the next city would give us a reward for these as evidence that we have killed the bear.'

Gerard exclaimed at the idea of eating in such a ghastly company, but Denys said that they must eat where there was a fire, and 'As for the dead fellows, they will not interrupt our meal !'

At this point the sleeper woke up and stared at the two strangers. He was startled, but tried to appear calm, and said gruffly, 'Good morrow,' but at the moment of saying it his hand went out for the axe and missed it. He then saw how Gerard was sitting upon it, and his face fell, much to Gerard's amusement.

'You make free with my fire,' said he ; but he added in a somewhat faltering voice, 'You are welcome.'

Denys whispered to Gerard.

'My comrade says, since we share your fire, you shall share his meal,' said Gerard.

'So be it,' replied the man, warmly, 'and I will fetch some bread which I have near by,' and he arose with a cheerful countenance and was retiring.

Denys caught up his cross-bow and levelled it at his head. The man fell on his knees.

'Sit down,' said Denys, getting Gerard to interpret his words to the man ; 'the fire is not big enough for more than three.'

The man grinned and seemed relieved at this. 'I knew not you were strangers,' said he.

With that they all sat down, and Gerard soon found himself eating in spite of their grim companions overhead.

'Ask him how they came here,' said Denys, pointing up.

On this question being interpreted to the watcher, he replied that treason had been their end, and began a long narrative. These honest gentlemen who now dangled here so miserably were all stout men and true, and lived in the forest by their wits. Their independence and thriving state had excited the jealousy of other people, but hitherto they had baffled all attempts upon their lives and liberties. But yesterday a party of merchants came slowly on their mules from Dusseldorf. The honest men saw them, and let them penetrate nearly three miles into the forest, and then set upon them. But alas! the merchants were no merchants at all, but soldiers in the pay of the Archbishop of Cologne; arms had they, and armour beneath their cloaks, and as soon as the fight began, more of them galloped up with these new weapons of war that shoot leaden bullets, and laid many an honest fellow low. The survivors they hanged, as was plain to see.

At the end of the rogue's story, Denys asked Gerard to tell the man he must accompany them and support Gerard. Gerard did not like, however, to put his hand on a thief for support.

'Childishness! all trades must live,' said Denys. 'Besides, I have my reasons. Be not wiser than your elder.'

'No. Only if I am to lean on him I must have my hand in my bosom, still grasping the handle of my knife.'

In that strange attitude, then, they set off. After an hour's march they saw plainly the towers and walls of Dusseldorf, and the man said gloomily, 'You may as well slay me at once as take me nearer to the city.'

As a thief he would be recognized and punished like his friends of the gibbet, so Gerard and Denys let him go back. He was given his axe, and even a few coins in return for his help. There was no wish, in those days, except in England, to aid the law against criminals.

When the man had gone, Denys told Gerard that it was lucky they had not lingered over their supper.

'What mean you?' asked Gerard.

'I mean they are not all hanged ; I saw seven or eight around our fire ere we had left it five minutes.'

'And you said not a word !'

'It would but have worried you, and have set our friend looking back. All other danger was over, and they could not see us ; we were out of the moonshine and just turning a corner. Ah ! there is the sun ; and here are the gates of Dusseldorf.'

'My head ! my head !' was all poor Gerard could reply.

So many shocks, emotions, perils, and horrors, added to the wound, had tried his youthful body too severely. A few hours later Denys sat watching his young friend as he lay sick of fever in a bedroom of the inn at Dusseldorf.

CHAPTER 24.

A doctor's discomfiture, and a bath in the Rhine.
Pursuit again.

THE next afternoon Gerard was somewhat better, but his sickness still kept him feverish and full of fancies. Denys was out in the town, having gone to buy a lemon for Gerard. The latter was becoming very impatient when the door opened gently. It was not Denys, however, but an old gentleman in a long sober gown trimmed with rich fur ; he wore pointed shoes, and by his side hung a sword. Behind him came a boy with a basketful of bottles and bandages. Gerard recognized that here was a doctor.

The old gentleman came softly to the bed and asked Gerard how he was. Gerard explained that his wound was better.

At this the old doctor asked to look at it. 'Aye, aye, a good clean bite,' he said : 'the dog had sound teeth that took this out.'

For a long time he refused to believe that no dog had bitten Gerard. At last he consented to hear the story of the bear. Then he declared that the remedy was the same, anyhow.

'Let me feel thy pulse : good !—fever. I ordain phlebotomy, and on the instant.'

'That is blood-letting,' said Gerard, and liked not the idea of it. 'Well, no matter, if it is sure to cure me.'

The doctor then bade his boy go and fetch the things needful, and meanwhile discoursed to Gerard.

'Any one can open a vein,' said he; 'the art is to know what vein to empty for what disease. The other day they brought me one tormented with earache. I let him blood in the right thigh, and away flew his earache. By the by, he has died since.'

In fact, all this doctor's patients seemed to have been quickly cured, but also to have died quickly!

Gerard became alarmed. The boy came in with a basin, hot water, and a keen-looking knife.

Gerard was putting out his ankle to be bled when Denys returned and stood surprised. When told what was to be done, he immediately advised Gerard not to be bled at all. He was weak already; why then lose more blood? He had seen many men die, he said, because they allowed these wretched doctors to meddle with them.

At that the doctor became very angry, and in a short time Denys and he were engaged in a fierce and loud dispute.

Gerard sighed wearily. 'Now, as all this is about me,' he said, 'give me leave to say a word.'

He then told them that between them they were killing him, since calmness and quiet were what he most needed. As there was doubt whether the remedy would really cure him, but no doubt at all that it would be very painful, he thanked the physician for coming, but would not keep him any longer from such other patients as might desire to lose their blood and money at the same time.

The old doctor was very angry, but could do nothing. He drew himself up and walked proudly to the door, followed by the boy with the basket; but there he turned, choking with rage, and told Gerard that now nothing could save him from death, since he had rejected his art. He came back again and again to hurl awful warnings upon poor Gerard, till finally Gerard took up the pillow and flung it in his face. Down went the doctor, and down went the boy, in a heap on the floor; the bottles were broken, and the old man was cut with the fragments. Then at last he departed with a look of fierce hatred at the patient who would not be cured!

The worthy physician went home, and applied some salve to his cuts. Then he made out a bill for broken bottles, and went to a magistrate who was his friend. Here he made oath that Gerard and Denys, being strangers and indebted to him, meditated instant flight from the town. Alas! it was his unlucky day! His sincere desire to perjure himself was baffled by a circumstance he had never foreseen. He had spoken the truth!

When the officers of the law went to the inn to arrest



them, Gerard and Denys were gone. This temporary escape the friends owed to Denys's good sense. He had seen how angry the doctor was, and knew that the magistrate was his friend. 'We are strangers here,' he said, 'and in five minutes we shall lie in prison for assaulting a dignity of Dusseldorf.'

They hastily settled with the landlord, and hurried down to the river.

Gerard felt better already at the thought of the fresh breezes on the famous Rhine.

Here they bargained for a boat with an old man and his two sons, and set off. The river took many turns, and this

sometimes brought the wind on their side instead of right behind them. Then they all moved to the side to prevent the boat leaning over too much—all but a child of about five years old, who was the grandson of the boat's owner and had slipped on board at the last moment. He was too light to make any difference.

Gerard was telling Denys all about the famous city of Cologne to which they were now journeying, when one of the boatmen pointed to the child and asked what was the matter with 'little fat-face'?

The child had burst out crying and continued to sob, but would not say what was wrong with him.

'Who can tell what ails the peevish brat?' grumbled the young boatman. 'Rather look this way and tell me whom these be after?'

They looked and saw four men walking along the east bank of the river. They were the policemen in pursuit of Denys and Gerard!

At this the boatmen consulted among themselves as to what they should do. They decided to give up their passengers to the policemen. At that moment a puff of wind came, and the little vessel heeled over; the men jumped to the side to balance the boat; but to their horror they saw water rushing into the boat, and the next moment they saw nothing, but felt the cold waters of the Rhine.

'Fat-face' had drawn the plug from the hole in the boat's bottom!

Gerard could swim like a duck. The dark water bubbled loudly over his head, and he came up almost blind and deaf for a moment; then he saw the upturned boat and some figures clinging to it; he shook his head like a dog and made for it. But ere he reached it, he heard a voice behind him cry, not loud, but with deep manly distress, 'Good-bye, comrade, good-bye!'

He looked and saw Denys sinking, weighed down by the cross-bow on his back.

Gerard uttered a wild cry and made for him, cleaving the water madly, but Denys was already under water. Now, however, the bow whose weight had sunk him helped his rescue. Gerard grasped it and by its means hoisted Denys up. He shouted to him,

'Grip me not! grip me not!' and Denys understood.

Seeing this, Gerard was hopeful and calm at once. If Denys had been frightened and struggled, nothing could have saved him, for he could not swim. As it was, Gerard bade him lie on his back and put one hand on his shoulder, and slap the water with the other. He took hold of Denys's long hair, and twisting it hard, caught the end between his teeth, and with the strong muscles of his youthful neck easily kept up the soldier's head, and struck out across the current to the opposite bank.

Soon they found themselves in shallow water, and so waded ashore. Once on firm land they looked at one another for an instant, and then flung each an arm round the other's neck, with hearts too full for speech. Life was sweet to them both at that moment, but sweeter, perhaps, to Gerard who had just saved his friend. To save a human life, and that life a loved one ! Such moments are worth living for !

Then, calmer, they took hands, and so walked along the bank, like a pair of lovers.

Denys observed that they could walk all the way to Cologne on this bank, but Gerard replied that he was not going to Cologne, but to Burgundy. He could reach Rome that way, and would not need to part from his friend.

Denys was delighted. He had been very sad at the thought that they must part in Cologne, as their roads lay different ways.

‘ This time,’ cried Denys, ‘ the devil is decidedly dead ! ’ and he jumped for joy.

So they turned their backs on the Rhine.

Suddenly across the water they heard a shout to them. ‘ Halt ! ’

Gerard turned, and saw the police officers, and his heart sank.

Not so with Denys ! He was a soldier, and took a military view of the situation. There was a river between them ; why yield ? ‘ I shall beat a retreat to that hill,’ said he ; ‘ and then being out of sight, run.’

They walked slowly up the hill ; the men on the other side kept shouting to them to halt ; at each shout, Denys turned and snapped his fingers in defiance.

Once over the hill they began to run. Soon Denys was

panting. 'Where is your fever?' he said to Gerard, 'I begin to miss it sadly!'

'Oh, I left it in the Rhine, I think;' answered Gerard.

That night they slept in the straw by the side of a threshing-ground, for they feared to sleep in an inn lest the police might come up with them. They started on in the morning rather late, for Gerard had slept long, and Denys had not wished to wake him. Sleep after fever is good.

As they walked on, Denys asked his friend how he felt. Gerard replied that his leg itched.

'Then thy wound is healing,' said Denys; 'since it is so I will tell thee a piece of news I would otherwise have withheld.'

'What is it?' asked Gerard, sparkling with curiosity.

'The police are after us, and on swift horses!'

Gerard was staggered by this sudden tidings; and his colour came and went. Then he clenched his teeth. Men of spirit are like wild boars; if they be pursued, they flee; but if they be pressed too hard, they turn, and their courage rises the higher. They consulted together. Prudence bade them avoid the village; hunger said 'Buy food'.

They settled to strike across the fields. Then, halting at a haystack, they made themselves comfortable in the hay, and sallying out in turn, came back with turnips that were growing in a field close by. These they ate at intervals. Presently they crept out shivering in the rain and darkness, and got into the road on the other side of the village.

It was a dismal night, dark, and blowing hard. They might have passed close to their foes and never known it. They almost forgot them in the blackness of the tempestuous night.

When the moon rose they were many miles from Dusseldorf. But they still walked on, and presently came to a huge building.

'Courage!' cried Denys, 'I think I know this monastery. Aye, I do. Cologne has no power here.'

The next moment they were safe within the walls.

CHAPTER 25

An hospitable monastery and a dangerous inn.

HERE Gerard made acquaintance with a monk who had constructed a great dial in the prior's garden, and a wheel for drawing water, and a winnowing machine for the grain. He had made several musical instruments and could play them divinely. He showed his skill to Gerard, who in turn showed him his beautiful writing. He was asked to stay the night, and persuaded Denys to remain.

Gerard told his new friend whither he was going, and described their late adventures.

'Alack!' said the good old man, 'I have been a great traveller in my day, but none molested me.' He then told him to avoid inns; they were always full of rogues and noisy ruffians; and to manage each day's journey so as to lie at some peaceful monastery. He took Gerard to one of the other monks, Father Anselm, a venerable old man with a face full of dignity and love. He talked to Gerard of religion, and made a plaster for his leg. He had heard from Gerard the story about the doctor, and rather sided with Denys upon 'bleeding'.

'The little four-footed creature,' he said, 'that kills the poisonous snake, if bitten herself, finds an herb powerful enough to quell that poison; and we monks, taught by her wisdom, and our own traditions, still search and try the virtues of those plants that are to be found upon this earth, some to feed men's bodies, some to heal them.'

That night they slept peacefully in the calm of the monastery after the perils and excitements of their journey.

Many days followed this, and they met no enemy but winter and rough weather as they drew near to the frontiers of Burgundy. Gerard was almost as eager for this promised land as Denys; for the latter was constantly praising it, and especially the excellence of its inns, and Gerard looked forward to seeing again clean sheets and comfortable beds.

At last they reached Burgundy. Denys was in high spirits; he took off his hat in salutation to every one he met, and gave most of them his old watchword; at which

some stared, some grinned, and some did both; and finally he landed his friend at one of the long promised Burgundian inns.

'It is a little one,' he said, 'but I know it of old for a good one; "The Three Fishes." But what is this written up? I do not remember this;' and he pointed to an inscription that ran across the whole building in a single line of huge letters. Gerard looked up and read, 'Pay as you enter. Trust is dead, bad faith killed him.'

They met the landlord in the passage.

'Welcome, sirs,' said he, taking off his cap with a low bow.

In the public room they found the mistress, a woman of forty. She bowed and smiled, and asked them to be seated. Gerard thought he was now come to a polite nation, and was delighted when he found they could have supper at once, and did not need to wait for all the other guests as in Germany. Soon their food was set before them, well cooked and daintily served. The maid who brought it kept them all laughing with her merry jests, so that altogether they spent a very happy evening, at the end of which Gerard was given a bed with clean white sheets.

In the morning they settled their bill and bade farewell to the kindly people of the inn. Gerard pointed to the sign.

'Oh, that is not meant for such as you,' said the landlord. 'It was put there to frighten moneyless folk away from the inn. But do you never pass "The Three Fishes"; should your purses be empty, bring yourselves.'

So they took the road again.

Towards afternoon they heard a faint wailing noise on ahead; it grew distincter as they proceeded. Soon they came up with the cause; a score of soldiers with several constables were marching along with a herd of people in front of them, like cattle. There were more than a hundred of these; the males were sullen and silent. It was the females from whom all the outcry came.

'What a band of them!' cried Gerard. 'Surely all of them cannot be thieves.'

Denys advised him to ask, so Gerard went up to one of the officers, and said, 'What do ye, sir, with these poor folk?'

The man explained that last year the town of Charmes

had been sorely thinned by a plague, whole houses had been emptied, and the trades were short of men to work. So the mayor and aldermen had written to the duke, and he had made order that inhabitants were to be brought in from some other town which was too full. These people were, therefore, much against their will being forcibly removed from their old homes to this town that was strange to them.

Gerard was very sorry for them, but Denys could see nothing to weep for. 'They are but going from one village to another,' said he.

But Gerard was more tender-hearted, and the sight reminded him of his own separation from Holland and Margaret.

Soon after this incident they met a soldier, an old comrade of Denys. He insisted on their coming into a tavern with him and sharing a bottle of wine. They found out that he was going to the duke's Flemish provinces to help quell an insurrection, and Gerard wrote a letter for him to take to Margaret. Then they shook hands and parted on opposite routes.

This delayed them, and evening surprised them ere they reached the little town for which Denys was making. However, they fell in with a roadside inn. They ordered supper, to which no objection was raised, only the landlord requested them to pay for it beforehand. This rather annoyed Denys, and he took out his purse and let the landlord see that he had plenty of money as he gave him a coin.

The maid, Manon, came in and gave them their supper, and afterwards Gerard, being tired, went upstairs to bed, but Denys was too glad to be back in his own country to care for sleep just yet, and strolled out into the inn yard.

He found a figure seated by the wall. It was Manon, and she was weeping bitterly. Denys could never bear to see a woman in distress, so he went up and tried to comfort her. But for some time she would not tell him what the trouble was. At last she said she was weeping for him.

'For me? Are you mad?' said the astonished Denys.

'No, I am not mad,' sobbed the girl: ' 'tis you that were mad to open your purse before him.'

She then told him that the landlord had seen Denys's

gold, and had gone out to fetch a band of robbers whom he employed to rob those who stayed at his inn. She implored Denys to fly while there was yet time.

'And you?' asked Denys.

'They will kill me,' she answered; 'they are sworn to slay all who betray them.'

'That shall they not,' said Denys, and he was just planning how she, Gerard, and he should all escape together when they heard a faint noise.

Denys listened. He heard footsteps, many footsteps, and no voices. She whispered in his ear, 'they are come,' and trembled like a leaf.

Denys felt it was so. Travellers in that number would never have come in dead silence.

'How many?' asked he, in a low whisper.

'Seven,' she answered; 'they are armed with sword and dagger; and the giant with his axe. They call him the abbot.'

'And my comrade?'

'Nothing can save him. Better lose one life than two. Fly!'

Denys's blood froze at this calm advice.

'Poor creature, you know not a soldier's heart!'

Then he thought a moment. 'Listen, girl! There is one chance for our lives if you will but be true to us. Run to the town; enter the nearest tavern and tell the first soldier there that a comrade here is sore beset, but armed, and his life may be saved if they will but run. Then to the police and bailiff. Nay! not a word! but fly!'

He saw her glide away in the darkness. How was he to get to Gerard?

He formed his plans quickly, and boldly entered the kitchen with his crossbow. There were seven hideous ruffians seated round the fire, and the landlord pouring them out strong brandy to give them courage for the work of blood.

'What? company!' cried Denys gaily: 'one minute my lads, and I'll be with you;' and he snatched up a lighted candle from the table, opened the door that led to the staircase, and went up it shouting, 'Gerard, where are you?'

For a moment he thought they had already killed Gerard.

There was no answer. Then he burst into the little room at the head of the stairs and found Gerard asleep.

‘ Thank God ! ’ he said, in a choking voice, then began to sing loud, untuneful songs. Gerard put his fingers into his ears ; but presently he saw in Denys’s face a horror that contrasted strangely with this sudden merriment.

‘ What ails you ? ’ said he, sitting up and staring.

‘ Hush ! ’ said Denys, and his hand spoke even more plainly than his lips. ‘ Listen to me,’ and he told him in whispers of their danger and his plans, talking out loud from time to time on other matters, that those below might not suspect. Next he went to the door and called out cheerfully to the landlord, ‘ The young fool will not come down. Give those honest fellows another bottle. I will pay for it in the morning.’

He heard a brutal and fierce chuckle.

Having by this made sure that the kitchen door was shut and no one listening there, he examined the chamber door closely ; then he quietly shut it, but did not bolt it, and went and inspected the window. It was too small to get out of, and just as he made the discovery, the outer door of the house was bolted with a loud clang. They were trapped.

CHAPTER 26

The midnight fight with the robbers at the tavern.

WOULD the thieves attack them while they were awake ? Probably not.

Not to throw away their best chance, Denys and Gerard made efforts to converse.

‘ I would fear them less, Gerard, but for one they call the abbot. I picked him out at once. Taller than you, bigger than both of us put together, and fights with an axe. I shall kill that man to-night or he will kill me. I think somehow ’tis he will kill me ! ’

‘ Saints forbid ! ’ said Gerard, ‘ shoot him at the door. What avails his strength against your weapon ? ’

‘ I shall pick him out ; but if it comes to close fighting, run swiftly under his guard, or you are a dead man. I tell

you neither of us may stand a blow of that axe ; you never saw such a body of a man.'

Gerard wanted to bolt the door ; but Denys showed him that half the door post turned outward on a hinge, and the great bolt was a mere pretence.

'I have not bolted it,' said he, 'that they may think us the less suspicious.'

Nearly an hour rolled away. It seemed an age. Yet it was but one hour : and the town was three miles distant. Some of the voices in the kitchen became angry and impatient.

'They will not wait much longer,' said Denys, 'and we have no chance at all unless we surprise them.'

There was a cupboard on the same side as the door, but between it and the window, reaching nearly to the ground. Denys opened the cupboard door and placed Gerard on a chair behind it. 'If they run for the bed, strike at the back of their necks ! A sword cut there always kills or disables.' He then arranged the bolsters and their shoes in the bed so as to deceive a person peeping from a distance. And now they grasped hands, and then took their posts.

Denys blew out the candle.

'We must keep silence now.'

They could hear each other's hearts thump at times.

'Good news !' breathed Denys, listening at the door. 'They are casting lots. Pray that it may be the abbot. If he comes alone I can make sure of him.'

Denys now pretended to snore. There was a scuffling of feet heard in the kitchen and then all was still. He who had drawn the lot seemed determined to run no risks.

When they were cold with waiting for the attack, the door on the stairs opened softly and closed again. There was another silence.

Then a single light footstep fell on the stair, a light shone under the door, and nothing more.

Presently there was a gentle scratching, not half so loud as a mouse's, and the false door post opened by degrees. It opened inwards, so Denys did not raise his crossbow from the ground, but merely grasped his dagger.

The candle was held up and shaded from behind by a man's hand. He was looking at the bed.

The man glided into the room. But at the first step

something in the position of the cupboard and chair made him uneasy. He ventured no further but put the candle on the floor and stooped to peer under the chair; but as he stooped an iron hand grasped his shoulder, and a dagger was driven so fiercely through his neck that the point came out at his gullet. He gave no cry, only a gasp. Half a dozen silent strokes followed, and the assassin was laid noiselessly on the floor.

Denys closed the door, bolted it gently, drew the post to, and whispered to Gerard to bring a chair.

'Set him up in it,' whispered Denys. 'Frighten them. Gain time.'

Even while saying this Denys had put a piece of string round the dead man's neck and tied him to the chair, and there the ghastly figure sat fronting the door.

Denys got his crossbow ready, and tearing off his straw mattress from the bed, reared it up before him and prepared to shoot, the moment the door should open.

Gerard meanwhile was busy about the seated corpse, when, to his amazement, Denys saw a luminous glow spreading rapidly over the white face. Gerard blew out the candle. On this the corpse's face shone still more, like a glow-worm's head. Denys shook, and his teeth chattered.

'What is this?' he whispered.

'Hush! 'tis but phosphorus, but 'twill serve to amaze them.'

Soon a step came softly but rapidly up the stairs; the door was gently tried.

When this resisted, the sham post was very cautiously moved, and an eye no doubt peeped through; for there was a howl of dismay, and the man was heard to stumble back and burst into the kitchen, where voices rose directly on his return.

Gerard ran to the dead thief and began to work on him again.

'I can make him ten times more fearful. They will not venture back yet awhile.'

In half a minute his painting brush made the dead head a sight to strike any man with dismay. The staring eyeballs he made globes of fire; the tongue and palate he tipped with fire, and on the brow he wrote in burning colours 'DEATH'.

The band below were now disputing loudly. At last one was heard to cry out, 'I tell you the devil has got him and branded him with hell-fire. I am more like to leave this cursed house than go again into a room that is full of fiends!'

The quarrelling continued some time and then there was dead silence.

Presently Denys whispered, 'Gerard!' Gerard looked and raised his sword.

Acutely as they had listened, they had heard of late no sound upon the stair. Yet there—on the door-post were the tips of the fingers of a hand! They began to crawl and crawl down towards the bolt. The moon shone through the window full upon them. Denys slowly raised his crossbow and took a steady aim. At last the string twanged. The hand was instantly nailed to the quivering door-post. There was a scream of anguish.

'Cut,' whispered Denys, eagerly, and Gerard's uplifted sword descended and severed the wrist with two swift blows. A body sank down moaning outside. The hand remained inside with blood trickling from it down the wall. The wounded man moved, and presently crawled down to his companions on the stairs.

Nothing was heard now but low muttering.

'The next will be the abbot,' said Denys.

Hardly had he spoken, when a heavy but active man darted up the steps; a single blow sent the door not only off its hinges, but right across the room on to Denys' fortifications, which it struck so rudely as nearly to lay him flat, and in the doorway stood a huge man with a glittering axe.

He caught sight of the dead man, with the horrible painted face and the fiery eyes; he stared, his arms fell, his knees knocked together, and he crouched in terror.

'Death!' he cried in tones of horror, and turned and fled; whereupon Denys started up and shot him through both jaws. He sprang with one bound into the kitchen.

Denys now found with dismay that he had no more bolts for the crossbow. They must rely on their swords alone, and the wounded giant would return, furious with the pain.

Suddenly a red light flickered on the ceiling. Gerard flew to the window. There were men with torches.

'We are saved! armed men!' he cried, and shouted out to them, 'Quick! quick! we are sore pressed.'

'Back!' yelled Denys.

That very moment the abbot and two men with naked swords rushed into the room. Even as they came, the outer door was hammered fiercely, and the abbot's comrades hearing it, turned and fled.

Not so the terrible abbot. Wild with rage and pain, he spurned his dead comrade, chair and all, across the room, and waved his tremendous axe.

The moment he raised it, Denys and Gerard flew at him like cats. He thrust the axe fiercely in Denys's face, and he went back staggering. Gerard had rushed in like lightning, and just as the axe turned to descend on him, drove his sword fiercely through the giant's body; Denys staggering back to help his friend saw a steel point come out at the abbot's back. The giant bellowed, and clutched Gerard's throat and shook him. But Denys drove his sword into the giant's back. Thus horribly spitted on both sides, the abbot gave a violent shudder. His lips fast turning blue, opened wide and deep, and he cried 'Death'—'Death'—in a roar of despair, and a third time in a horror-stricken whisper.

Just then the street door was forced.

Suddenly the abbot's arms whirled like windmills and his huge body wrenched wildly. They tore out their swords, but ere they could stab again, the abbot leaped up and fell with a tremendous crash against the door, carrying it away with him like a sheet of paper. This sight was too much for the thieves below, who were preparing to resist the archers that rushed in from the street. Smitten with dismay as they saw their leader dead, they fell on their knees directly, and the archers bound them, while above the rescued ones stood still, their dripping swords extended in the red torchlight, expecting their indomitable enemy to leap back on them as wonderfully as he had gone.

'Where be the true men?'

'Here we be. God bless you all! God bless you!'

There was a rush to the stairs and half a dozen hard but friendly hands were held out and grasped them warmly. 'You have saved our lives, you have saved our lives this night,' cried Denys.

Gerard went round the archers and took them each by the hand with glistening eyes. Then he said to one handsome archer of his own age, 'Prithce, good soldier, have an eye to me. A strange drowsiness overcomes me. Let no one cut my throat while I sleep—for pity's sake.'

The archer promised with a laugh, for he thought Gerard was jesting; but the latter went off into a deep sleep almost immediately.

Denys was surprised at this, but he turned to the archers and said they must have some wine after their timely help.

They left the room, and finding a short flight of stone steps, descended them and entered a large, low, damp cellar.

Here they found the landlord cowering in a corner.

'Why, man, the thieves are bound, and we are dry that bound them,' said one of the archers. 'Up! and show us your wine; for I see no bottles here.'

'What, be the rascals bound?' stammered the pale landlord; 'good news. W—w—wine? that will I, honest sirs.'

And he rose unsteadily and offered to lead the way to the wine cellars. But Denys interposed. 'You are all in the dark comrades. He is in league with the thieves.'

But this the landlord denied. In the midst of his protests some one probed a heap of rags in the corner. Out came a bone and rattled on the floor.

The landlord cried, 'Nay, nay, there is nothing there. The wine is in the next cellar.'

But Denys had been raking about. 'What is this?' he cried to the landlord, and thrust a small object in his face.

'Alas! I know not. The bones are bones of sheep and kids, and not of men and women.'

But even as he spoke, Denys drew out of the heap a human skull.

The landlord's hair rose visibly on his head, and his knees gave way under him. But the archers seized him and made him face the ghastly skull.

'Ah!' said Denys, solemnly, and trembling now with rage, 'look on the sockets out of which you have picked the eyes, and let them blast your eyes that crows shall pick ere this week ends.'

Soon the heap was scattered, and alas! not one, but

many skulls were brought to light, the culprit moaning at each discovery.

Suddenly Denys uttered a cry of distress—strange from one so bold and hard—and held up to the torch a mass of human hair. It was long, glossy, and golden, a woman's beautiful hair.

'I have a little sister with hair just so fair and shining as this,' gulped Denys. 'There, quick! take my sword and dagger, and keep them from my hand, lest I strike him dead and cheat the gallows.' Then in a sudden fury he seized the landlord fiercely by the neck and forced him to his knees; foot on head he ground his face savagely among the bones of his victims; and the assassin yelped and whined like a dog.

Next he took a bowstring, and passing it through the eyes of a skull, hung the ghastly relic of crime round the man's neck; then pulled him up and kicked him into the kitchen, where one of the aldermen of the town with his constables had arrived. Oh! that every murderer, and contriver of murder, could see that wretched landlord, sick and staggering with terror, the cold skull of his victim round his neck!

The alderman took the evidence of the archers, and sent the constables upstairs. But the head constable no sooner saw the phosphorescent corpse seated by the bedside than he recoiled in horror; he tumbled over backward on his nearest companion; he, in turn, was upset, and so they all fell down the steep stairs and lay in a heap at the bottom.

'What is it now?' cried the alderman, starting up in considerable alarm. But Denys explained.

Before dawn, the thieves, alive and dead, and all the relics of the crime, were carried off by the officers of the law, and the inn was silent. There remained in it but one constable and Denys and Gerard, the latter still sleeping heavily.

CHAPTER 27

An escape from justice. The friends make a new start,
which leads to an abrupt parting.

It was noon when Gerard awoke from his long sleep. He and Denys went out into the market-place, and there they met two processions. One was a large one, attended with noise and howls—the prisoners going to exposure in the market-place; the other, accompanied only by a few nuns and friars, came slow and silent—the gathered bones of the victims carried to the church-yard.

The two met in the narrow street nearly at the inn door, and could not pass each other for a long time, and the bier, that bore the relics of the dead, got wedged against the cart that carried the men who had made those bones what they were, and in a few hours must die for it themselves.

This strange meeting parted Denys and Gerard for a time. The former, moved by curiosity, followed the malefactors, the other went to the church, and took part in the ceremonies of burial. There, after the rites, he spoke with the old priest of the place, and went home with him and told him the whole story of their perilous night.

The old man was glad to hear his news and invited him to come again to see him.

When Gerard left him, he had not gone far on his way back to the inn to rejoin Denys, when two constables stopped him and told him he must come with them.

‘Why?’ asked Gerard in astonishment.

‘To prison,’ said they, producing a big document.

‘What for?’

‘What for? Why, sorcery!’

On the way Gerard recovered his presence of mind and asked the men to take him before the alderman whom they had seen in the inn.

This the men refused to do, saying they were ordered to take him to prison; but on Gerard’s giving them money, they yielded.

The alderman told Gerard the main charge was that he had set a dead body burning with magical fire that flamed and did not consume. ‘And if ’tis true, young man, I am

sorry for you, for you will assuredly burn with a fire of good pine logs in the market-place for it.'

'Oh, sir, for pity's sake,' cried poor Gerard, 'let me have speech with the priest.'

The alderman advised Gerard against it, as the Church was harder upon sorcerers than the corporation.

'But, sir, I am innocent,' said Gerard.

'Oh; if you think you are innocent! Officer, go with him to the priest. But see he escapes you not.'

They found the priest, and Gerard told him his trouble. Luckily he had told the priest about the phosphorus before, so he now believed him, and took him inside his house, while the constable stood outside, quaking, for he was afraid of magic. Inside, Gerard showed the priest how it was done. He smeared phosphorus on an image the priest had in his room, and the priest was delighted with the effect. He at once went with him to the alderman and explained that Gerard was no magician, but had used in self-defence a secret of chemistry well-known to him and to all churchmen.

So Gerard was set at liberty, and gave the priest all his phosphorus in gratitude.

The worthy man made use of it later. A few weeks afterwards letters of fire appeared upon the wall of the church, exhorting the people to give more generous alms. This was hailed as a great miracle, and the old priest gained no small advantage out of it. Had he been present, Gerard might have explained the miracle, but he was far away and had very different things to think of.

For he and Denys had left the town next day, and as they went out from it they passed the bodies of the thieves hanged upon a gallows. A hand was nailed to the beam. And hard by, on a wheel, was clawed the dead landlord, with every bone in his body broken to pieces.

Gerard averted his head and hurried by: Denys lingered and triumphed over his dead foes. 'Times are changed, my lads, since we two sat shaking in the cold awaiting you seven to come and cut our throats.'

'Fie, Denys!' said Gerard. 'Death squares all reckonings. Pray pass on without a word, if you prize my respect.'

To this earnest remonstrance Denys yielded. He even said thoughtfully, 'You have been better brought up than I!'

They continued their journey for two or three days, and then Denys announced that he had made up his mind to accompany Gerard all the way to Rome. Gerard was very pleased, and they went on together in great good humour, till a company of mounted soldiers, about fifty in number, rose to sight on the brow of a hill.

'See the banner of Burgundy,' said Denys, joyfully. 'I shall look out for a comrade among these.'

'How gorgeous is the standard in the sun,' said Gerard; 'and how brave are the leaders with velvet and feathers, and steel breastplates like glassy mirrors!'

When they came near enough to distinguish faces, Denys uttered an exclamation: 'Why, 'tis the duke himself, as I live. Nay, then, there is fighting afoot since he is out; a gallant leader, Gerard, rates his life no higher than a private soldier's, and a soldier's no higher than a bird's; and that is the captain for me.'

'And see, Denys, the very mules with their great brass frontlets and trappings seem proud to carry them; no wonder men itch to be soldiers.' In the midst of this innocent admiration the troop came up with them.

'Halt,' cried a loud voice. The troop halted. The duke bent his brow gloomily on Denys: 'How now, bowman? How comes it that thy face is turned southward when every good hand and heart is hurrying north?'

Denys replied respectfully that he was going on leave, after some years of service, to see his kindred.

'Good. But this is not the time for it. Ho! bring that dead soldier's mule to the front; mount her and forward with us to Flanders.'

'So please your highness,' said Denys, firmly, 'that may not be. My home is close at hand. I have not seen it these three years, and above all, I have this poor youth in charge, whom I may not, cannot leave, till I see him shipped for Rome.'

'Do you bandy words with me?' said the chief, with amazement turning fast to wrath. 'Are you weary of life? Let go the youth's hand, and into the saddle without more idle words.'

Denys made no reply; but he held Gerard's hand the tighter and looked defiance.

At this the duke roared, 'Jarnac, dismount six of your

archers, and shoot me this white-livered cur where he stands—for an example.’

The young Count of Jarnac gave the order, and the men dismounted to execute it.

‘Oh, nay, nay, nay!’ cried Gerard, awaking from the stupor into which this thunderbolt of tyranny had thrown him. ‘He shall go with you on the instant. I’d rather part with him for ever than see a hair of his head harmed. Oh, sir, oh, my lord, give a poor boy but a minute to bid his only friend farewell! he will go with you. I swear he shall go with you.’

The stern leader nodded a cold, contemptuous assent.

‘You, Jarnac, stay with them, and bring him on alive or dead.—Forward!’ And he resumed his march, followed by all the band but the young count and six archers, one of whom held the spare mule.

Denys and Gerard gazed at one another haggardly. Oh, what a look!

After this mute interchange of anguish they spoke hurriedly, for the moments were flying by.

‘You go to Holland; you know where she bides. Tell her all,’ said Gerard.

Denys replied, ‘Make for the Rhine, Gerard. ’Tis but a step. Then down to Rotterdam, where Margaret is. I go thither, I’ll tell her you are coming. We shall all be together.’

‘My lads, haste, or you will get us into trouble,’ said the count firmly, but not harshly now.

‘Oh, sir, one moment! one little moment!’ panted Gerard. He held out his arms and they locked one another in a close embrace.

The rough soldiers, to whom ‘comrade’ was a sacred name, looked on with some pity in their hard faces. Then at a signal from Jarnac, with kind force and words of rude consolation, they almost lifted Denys on to the mule; and putting him in the middle of them, spurred after their leader. And Gerard ran wildly after to see the last of him at the turning of the lane. Then he could run no more nor breathe, but gasped, and leaned against the hedge, seizing it and choking piteously, till the thorns ran into his hand.

After a bitter struggle he got his breath again; and now

began to see his own misfortune. Yet it all seemed like a dream. Scarce five minutes ago they were so happy, faring to Rome together, and admiring the gay helmets and banners.

He was dragging his weary limbs along when he heard horses' feet and gay voices behind him. He turned with a wild hope that the soldiers had relented and were bringing Denys back. But no ; it was a gentleman of rank and his retainers in velvet and furs and feathers. They swept gaily



by. Gerard never looked after them, but went on as in a dream. He was, however, rudely awakened ; suddenly a voice in front of him cried harshly, 'Stand and deliver !' and there were three of the gentleman's servants in front of him. They had ridden back to rob him.

'How now, ye false knaves,' said he quite calmly : 'would ye shame your noble master ?' and he drew his sword and prepared to defend himself.

'Be not so mad !' said one, 'look yonder.'

Gerard looked, and scarce a hundred yards off the nobleman and his friends had halted, and sat on their horses looking at the lawless act, too proud to do their own dirty

work, but not too proud to reap the fruit, and watch lest their agents should rob them of another's money.

Gerard saw that resistance was useless.

'Take then the poor man's purse to the rich man's pouch,' said he; 'and with it this; tell him, I pray God that each coin in it may burn his hand and freeze his heart and blast his soul for ever. Begone and leave me to my sorrow!' He flung the purse after them. They rode away muttering, for his words pricked them a little; and he staggered on, penniless now as well as friendless, till he came to the edge of a wood. Here he crawled to the roadside, and stretched out his limbs on the snow, with a deep sigh.

In peril from the weather, in peril from wild beasts, in peril from hunger, friendless and penniless, in a strange land, and not half-way to Rome, Gerard lay down and slept.

CHAPTER 28

Gerard learns worldly wisdom from a beggar.
The adventure of the mill.

HE had slept an hour or two when he was awakened by a hand shaking him. He looked up and saw a servant girl standing over him.

'Are you mad,' said she, 'to sleep in snow, where wolves are about, too? Are you weary of life? Come, now, get up like a good lad.'

He rose, and she asked him, 'Are you rich or are you poor?'

At this the memory of his loss came back to Gerard and he gave a great cry, and said, 'An hour ago I was rich in a friend, rich in money, rich in life and spirits of youth; but now the Duke of Burgundy has taken my friend, and another gentleman my purse; and I can neither go forward to Rome nor back to her I left in Holland. I am the poorest of the poor.'

'Alack!' said the wench, 'if you had been rich I had had no use for you; but being poor you are our man, so come along with me.'

Then she took Gerard to a fine house close by, and into a noble dining-hall hung with black: and there was set

a table with many dishes, and but one plate and one chair.

‘Eat!’ said she, in a whisper.

‘Alone?’ said Gerard.

‘Alone? And which of us, think you, would eat of the same dish? Are we robbers of the dead?’ Then she asked where Gerard was born, and when he had told her, she explained that when a gentleman died in Burgundy they served up his dinner as usual, till he was buried, and set some poor man down to it.

Then the kind girl pressed him to eat, and poured out wine. But Gerard’s heart was sad, for he was thinking of Denys.

Afterwards she took him to the men of the house, and they gave him a bed for the night. Gerard learnt that the nobleman who had robbed him was brother to the great lady of the district; if he complained to her he was more likely to be hanged than given back his own.

Next day he set off towards the Rhine, and often he sat down by the roadside and groaned.

It chanced that as he was sitting at a place where two roads met, there came one singing like a bird down the other road. Gerard looked up to see what could make one so light-hearted in this sad world, and lo! the songster was a hump-backed cripple, with a bloody bandage over his eye, and both legs gone at the knee!

When he saw Gerard he came hobbling up and cried, ‘Charity, for the love of heaven, charity!’ with a piteous whine.

‘Alack, poor soul!’ said Gerard; ‘charity is in my heart, but not in my purse; I am as poor as you.’

But the beggar would not believe him, and to melt his heart undid his sleeve, and showed a sore wound in his arm.

Gerard saw and groaned, and told him how he had been robbed of his last coin.

At that the man left off whining all in a moment, and said, in a big manly voice, ‘Then I’ll take a rest. Here, youngster, pull this strap; nay, fear not!’

Gerard pulled, and down came a stout pair of legs out of his back; and half his hump had melted away, and the wound in his eye was no deeper than the bandage!

Seeing Gerard astounded, the beggar laughed heartily,

told him he was not worth deceiving, and offered him his protection.

‘You will starve alone in this thievish land,’ he said.

Travel teaches the young wisdom. There was a time when Gerard would have fled from this impostor as from a pestilence; now he listened patiently to learn his advice. But he shivered when the man proposed to teach him the beggars’ ways of whining, and painting sores and ulcers on the body to deceive the charitable. Gerard said he would never shame himself or his folk so. The beggar then asked Gerard what he could do. ‘Could he paint?’ Yes. ‘Could he sing to the harp?’ Yes, a little. ‘Could he tell stories?’ Yes, by the score.

‘Then,’ said he, ‘I hire you from this moment.’

‘What to do?’ said Gerard.

‘Naught dishonest,’ replied the man. ‘I will feed you all the way and find you work; and take half your earnings, no more.’

‘Agreed,’ assented Gerard, and gave his hand on it.

‘Now, servant,’ said the man, ‘we will dine. But you need not stand behind my chair, for two reasons; first, I have no chair, and next, I like good fellowship better than state.’ And out of his wallet he brought fowl and pastry, and spices and wine fit for a king. Gerard never feasted better than he did out of that beggar’s wallet.

Then the two took the road together; and presently they came to a place where were two little wayside inns, not far apart.

‘Go in,’ said the man to Gerard; ‘praise the inn, all but the sign outside, and offer to colour it cheap. Shun the landlord: speak to the wife.’

Gerard went in and told the wife he was a painter, and would repaint her sign cheaply; but she sent him away with a rebuff. Gerard went back to his master, who groaned and said, ‘You are all fingers and no tongue. I have made a bad bargain. Come and hear me flatter.’

Between the two inns was a high hedge. He went behind it a minute and came out a decent tradesman. Then he went to the other inn and praised it so highly that the woman blushed.

‘But,’ said he, ‘there is one little, little fault. The sign outside is dull and faded. Say but the word, and for a franco

my apprentice here shall make it bright as ever it was.' While she hesitated the rogue told her he had done it to a little inn hard by, and now the inn looked as gay as the starry heaven.

'Do you hear that?' cried she to the landlord; 'our inn shall not be outshone!'

So Gerard painted, and his master stood by like a lord, and he got a silver franc.

Next he took Gerard back to the other inn, and putting a beard on him to disguise him, on the way, he told them there how he had adorned the other inn, and so earned another franc. Then Gerard was sent on, and the man found his crutches, and making himself a cripple once more, showed his sores and bandages at the inn and got both food and money.

When he rejoined Gerard he told him he was a good painter, but too slow. So Gerard let him know that in matters of honest craft things could not be done quick and well. 'Then do them quick!' said he.

As they journeyed on Gerard learnt many of the tricks of beggars from this cunning rogue; one day he showed Gerard how a fit may be feigned; he rolled on the ground and foamed at the lips, and all the foam came from a little piece of soap in his mouth!

Gerard had thought that a beggar was a beggar, and one like another, but now he learnt the names and disguises of full thirty sorts of crafty mendicants who roamed through Europe; he heard, too, for the first time of the signs they place on trees and walls, to warn their fellow beggars of danger from police or townsfolk who are not to be deceived.

Often when they came to a village Gerard sat down in the market-place and played and sang, and the delighted villagers gave them money; often, too, at night, he made a portrait of the innkeeper or his wife, and so they went away richer from that inn, which it is not the lot of many to do.

At times his master was ill at ease. Going through one town they came upon a beggar walking, fastened by one hand to the back of a cart, and the hangman lashing his bare back. Gerard winced, and his master hung his head.

'Soon or late,' said he, 'soon or late.' And Gerard, seeing his haggard face, knew what he meant.

One afternoon Gerard got some painting work to do, so his companion put on his rags, and colouring his face, made himself appear stricken with jaundice, and went through the town begging.

Now in all the towns were certain licensed beggars, and one of these, an old blind man, was a favourite with the townsfolk. He had his seat by a church. When he saw Gerard's master coming along he knew him for an impostor, so sent and warned the constables. Gerard met them taking his master to his trial in the town-hall, and followed with many others.

At the trial the beggar was in no way abashed, but as bold as could be. However, there were some there who had seen him before, and these gave evidence against him, with the result that he was sent to prison.

Gerard tried to get speech with him, but the jailer denied him. Lingerling near the jail, however, he heard a whistle, and there was his companion at a narrow window. Gerard threw up to him all the money he had, at which the man was very grateful, and also astonished. 'Had I met one like you at starting in this world, I had put my wit to better use, and then I had not lain here,' said he.

So Gerard parted from him, having learnt much from his company, though he was a rogue; for he knew now how to make money by his playing and his painting.

As he went along alone a few days later, and was passing a grand house, out came, on prancing steeds, a gentleman in brave attire and two servants. The gentleman bade Gerard halt and take off his coat.

Gerard said, 'Bethink you, my lord, 'tis winter. How may a poor fellow go bare and live?'

Then he told Gerard that he had mistaken him, and took off his own gay coat and held it forth to Gerard. A servant let him know it was a penance. 'His lordship had had the ill luck to slay his cousin.'

Down to his shoes he changed with Gerard, and set him on his own steed. 'Now, good youth!' said he, 'you are the count, and I, late count, your servant. Play thy part well, and give me what orders you will; I will be as humble as I may, and expiate my sin.'

This suited Gerard well, and he travelled thus in great comfort for a long way. It amused him to see how civil

the innkeepers were to him now that he was a count ! He treated his servant the count and his servants well, so that, when the penance was ended, the count made him keep the horse and five gold pieces, and said, 'I see 'tis more noble to be loved than feared.'

At Augsburg Gerard saw his first printing press, and was much delighted with various mechanical devices made by the clever craftsmen of the city. Here he sold his horse and received a fair price for it, which much astonished him. He then started for Venice with a company of merchants, all armed and travelling together for fear of the robbers on the road to Italy.

On this journey a strange adventure befell him. One afternoon, as they were toiling up the mountain road, Gerard wearied of the slow pace of the caravan and went on ahead. Presently he came to two roads, and took the larger. Here he made a mistake, for he should have gone by the other ; so he turned back, and thinking his company had long passed by, pushed bravely on, but could not overtake them.

Then he was anxious and ran, but no sign of them could he see. The moon rose bright and clear, and presently, a little way off the road, he saw a windmill.

Gerard went up and knocked at the mill door, but none answered. So in he went and gladly, for the night was cold. There was a stove, and he lighted it with some of the hay and wood that lay outside, and went to sleep. But soon he woke up and found a dozen men around him, with wild faces and long black hair and dark sparkling eyes.

He made excuses to them as well as he could in the little Italian he knew. They grinned. He told them he had lost his party and was hungry, but they only grinned the more. He thought to fly, but saw the door was bolted. Then it came to his mind, 'These will not let me out ; they are robbers. How can I escape ?'

So he feigned drowsiness, and one of them nodded, and taking up a lamp, took him up a winding staircase to the very top of the mill, into a room where there was a heap of straw in one corner and many empty barrels, and by the wall a truckle bed. The man pointed to it, and went downstairs heavily, taking the light, for in this room was a great window, and the moon shone in brightly. Gerard looked

out to see, and lo ! it was so high that even the mill sails at their highest did not come up to the window by some feet, but turned, very slow and stately, underneath, there being scarcely any wind. That hope of flight was gone.

For precaution against surprise he thought to put the bed against the door, but found it clamped fast with iron to the floor. So he flung his harp on the bed, and made a layer of straw at the door so that none could open it without his knowing. Then he laid his sword at his side and turned to sleep. He could hear them making merry and drinking below.

How long he slept he knew not, but suddenly he woke with a start. All below was silent now. And scarce was he awake, when suddenly the bed was gone with a loud clang, and there was a great hole in the floor ; he heard his harp fall and break to atoms below. The bed and all had dropped into a well. And so would Gerard, had he been lying upon it !

At first he was stupefied. Next horror fell upon him, and he rose trembling and looked into that fearsome gap. Then he turned quite calm and made up his mind to die, sword in hand. He knew the men would come to kill him, now he had learned their secret way of murder. But the sight of the straw gave him an idea. He seized upon it, and twisted it eagerly to make a rope out of it as he had been taught to do once in Holland. While he worked, he heard a door open below. That was a terrible moment. Even as he twisted his rope he went to the window and looked down at the great arms of the mill coming slowly up, then passing, then turning less slowly down, as it seemed ; and he thought, 'They do not go as when there is wind ; yet, slow or fast, what man ever rode on such a steed as these and lived.' But it was his only chance.

So he fastened his rope and let himself gently down, fixing his eye on that huge arm of the mill, which was then creeping up to him. Watching for it to come near, he thrust himself out a little with his foot from the wall, and gripped with all his might the woodwork of the sail, and next moment was in the air upon it. He felt little motion ; the stars seemed to go round the sky, and then the grass came up to him nearer and nearer, and when the grass was quite close, he gave a leap and went flying along

it. He got up breathless and immediately sank down again ; one leg was injured and he could not stand upon it. Even as he lay groaning he could hear the assassins running up the stairs. The mill shook under them. They had found that Gerard had not fallen into their trap, and were running to kill him.

Gerard struggled up in agony, more like some wounded beast than a man. He had now no fear, only an intense desire to revenge himself upon these men. Leaning on his sword-hilt, he hobbled up to the mill door, and piled up a heap of hay and wood ; then he drove his dagger into one of the barrels of spirits standing there, and flinging it on, lighted the pile. The fire, fed by the spirits, blazed up ; he threw on more and more barrels ; the fire now roared like a lion for its prey, and voices answered it inside from the top of the mill, and the feet came thundering down. Gerard stood as near that awful fire as he could, with uplifted sword to slay and be slain. The bolt was drawn. A tar-barrel caught fire. The door was opened. What followed ? The men did not come out, but the fire rushed in at them like a living death, and the first he thought to fight with lay blackened on the floor.

Gerard heard them run up again, and hack with their swords a little way up, at the mill's wooden sides ; but they had no time to hew their way out ; the fire was at their heels and the smoke burst out at every loophole. Gerard hobbled back, racked with pain and fury, and saw white faces up at the window far above. They saw and cursed him, and Gerard waved his sword and shouted madly, ' Come down the road I came ; but ye must come one by one, and as ye come, ye die upon this steel.'

One of the assassins leaped at the sail as Gerard had done, but missed his footing and fell at Gerard's feet, a broken mass. The rest screamed like women, and the fire roared up the mill like a furnace in its chimney.

Then Gerard's fury left him, and he staggered away terror-stricken from the sight of his revenge, and as he went, there was a loud crash ; the mill fell in upon the fire, a thousand sparks shot up into the air, and the ground was strewn with burning wood and men.

By the great light Gerard saw a company coming towards him up the road, and hobbled down to meet them. Ere he

had gone far, he heard a swift step behind him, and turned to see one of his enemies, escaped somehow from that awful ruin. Gerard put his other foot to the ground and turned to fly, in spite of the pain. But he could not get away fast enough, and had to wheel and face death once more. Their swords clashed. Gerard cut swiftly upwards, and the man's hand dangled bleeding at the wrist. He stood and cursed Gerard, and felt for his dagger to spring in upon him.

But a great cry arose behind Gerard ; the man gnashed his teeth and fled cursing. Gerard turned, and saw torches close at hand. They began to dance up and down, as he thought, and next moment all was dark to him. Gerard had fainted.

CHAPTER 29

A shipwreck on the way to Rome.

WHEN Gerard came to himself he was seated in a litter, and one of the merchants of his company was tending his sprained leg. They had been delayed on the road, and had come up to the burning mill just in time to rescue him.

In this way he travelled down into the rich plains of Northern Italy, a land of goodly rivers, pleasant orchards, and blooming gardens.

And so they came to Venice, at that time the most prosperous seaport in the world. Gerard went in his litter (for he could not walk yet) to see the famous church of St. Mark. Outside it, towards the market-place, is a noble gallery, and above it four horses, cut in brass by the ancient Romans ; about the church are six hundred pillars of marble and porphyry, adorned with all manner of precious stones.

All these wonders Gerard saw, but one thing more wonderful far to him than them all. For one day he went to the quay and there among the vessels come from overseas he saw a Dutch boat, and painted on the stern of it the name of the owner. And that name was ' Richart, son of Elias of Amsterdam ', his own brother !

Then Gerard wept for thought of his home and his

kinsfolk, and wrote a letter to be sent in that ship when she should return back to Holland, wherein he wrote the account of all these adventures, and many more.

In Venice his leg soon healed, and Gerard took ship for Rome. But he was not fated to reach that city without misfortune.

Within sight of land a terrific storm arose, and the ship was in sore danger of being overwhelmed by the mighty waves that beat upon her. All was in confusion. The sailors were frightened, and ran hither and thither along the decks; the passengers were huddled together round the mast, some sitting, some kneeling in prayer, some lying prostrate. Prayers and vows rose from the shivering throng, and Gerard gazed upon the cruel sea with white face and trembling lips.

Suddenly a gust of wind stronger than usual caught the sail and tore it from the mast; the ship reeled helpless, battered by the waves. The captain gave the order to fling all the cargo overboard to lighten the vessel. One old man clung to his heavy sack when the sailors came to take it. 'Tis my all,' he cried; 'the whole fruits of my journey!' But they flung it over into the sea, and the old man would have jumped in after it, had it not sunk out of sight.

Soon the sailors were seen to be preparing to desert the sinking ship in the little boat which even then every ship carried. There was a rush of people eager to save themselves, and thirty crowded into it. A few remained behind, of whom Gerard was one, and a tall priest another, and besides them a Roman woman, sitting pale and patient with her child close to her bosom.

Gerard saw her, and his manhood was aroused.

'See! See!' he said, 'they have taken the boat and left the poor woman and her child to perish.'

His heart soon set his wits working.

'I'll save you yet, please God!' he cried to her, and ran to find a cask or plank to float her. There was none.

Then his eye fell on a wooden image, and he seized it.

'Come, woman, I'll lash you and the child to this.'

She turned her eyes on him and uttered but one word: 'Yourself?'

'I am a man,' replied Gerard, 'and have no child to take care of.'



Then he lashed the image to her side, and launched her into the waves.

The ship was sinking fast. A heavy hand fell on Gerard's shoulder, and a deep voice said, 'Tis well. Now come with me.'

It was the big priest.

Gerard turned, and the priest laid hold of the broken mast. They hoisted it up, cast it into the sea, and jumped after and clung to it.

It was a terrible situation. The mast rose and plunged with each wave like a kicking horse, and the spray blinded them. But at last they drifted in to within a hundred yards of the shore, and the natives sent stout fishermen, holding hands in a long chain, into the surf, and so dragged them to shore. The priest shook himself, bestowed a short blessing on the natives, and went on to Rome, with eyes bent on earth, according to his rule.

Gerard grasped every hand upon the beach. They brought him to an enormous fire, at which he dried himself, and putting on a fisherman's dress, went down to the beach. There he found that the captain had come ashore on a piece of the wreck, but the thirty selfish people were all drowned; their dead bodies were washed up later.

The Roman woman came up to him with the child, burning with womanly gratitude. Gerard kissed the child more than once; he was fond of children, but he said nothing. He was much moved; and the woman did not speak at all, but thanked him with her eyes and glowing cheeks. Perhaps she was right. Gratitude is not a thing of words. She thanked him from her heart.

CHAPTER 30

After some struggles Gerard's writing brings him success.

NEXT day, Gerard, a boy no more, but a man who had shed blood in self-defence and grazed death by land and sea, reached Rome, the eternal city. He took a cheap lodging on the west bank of the Tiber, Rome's great river, and every day went forth in search of work, taking specimens of his writing round to the shops.

They received him coldly. They did not want writers to copy Latin manuscripts, but Greek, they told him, and Gerard could not write the Greek character so well as the Latin. Nevertheless, he did not lose courage, but borrowed a beautiful Greek manuscript at a high price, and went home and copied it. When he carried round a better Greek specimen than any the shop-keepers possessed, they informed him that Greek and Latin were alike unsaleable; the city was thronged with works of art from all Europe. He should have come last year. Gerard's landlady, pleased with his looks and manners, used often to speak a kindly word to him. One day she asked him what had dashed his spirits, and he told her. She then let him know that all these traders were cunning and sly; really Gerard wrote too well for them; his writing might spoil the look of what they were selling. 'All the world knows,' said she, 'that for many years our great folk have poured out money like water for well written parchments. There is the Pope himself; he could keep a score such as you writing night and day.' And she promised to find him work.

Gerard sent round specimens of his writing to the houses of great nobles. But he had no reply. Then he laid in playing cards to colour, and struck off a meal per day, for his money was being exhausted.

But the kind landlady would not have this. She would feed him for nothing, she said, till his fortunes mended, and she would ask her acquaintances if any of them might find him work.

One day she came to him and said a friend of hers had heard of a nobleman who was a great patron of art, and employed many in the copying of Greek manuscripts. She would take Gerard to him. So Gerard went down from his room to meet this woman, Teresa, as his landlady called her, and she turned out to be the very Roman mother whom he had saved from the wreck.

'Ah, madam,' said he, 'is it you? The good dame told me not that. And the little fair-haired boy, is he well? is he none the worse for his voyage in that strange boat?'

'He is well,' said the matron.

'Why, what are you two talking about?' said the landlady, staring at them both in turn, 'and why do you tremble so, Teresa?'

'He saved my child's life,' said Teresa, making an effort to be calm.

Then the whole story came out, and Gerard was overwhelmed with thanks and gratitude.

Next day Teresa came again to conduct him to the house of Fra Colonna, a great churchman, related to many noble families. Gerard took with him a well written specimen of his work.

As they were going along the streets, Gerard noticed that a man was stealthily following them, sometimes afar, sometimes close. He told Teresa.

She coloured faintly and said, 'It is my poor husband, Lodovico.' And she stopped and beckoned to the man. He came up, rather unwillingly, as it appeared to Gerard.

'Lodovico,' said she, 'know this young sir of whom I have so oft spoken to you. Know him and love him, for he it was who saved thy wife and child.'

At this Lodovico changed to an expression of heartfelt gratitude and embraced Gerard warmly. There was something in the man's manner that made Gerard uncomfortable, but he said, 'We shall have your company, sir?'

'No, sir,' replied Lodovico, 'I go not on that side Tiber.'

They said farewell, and continued their way in silence till they reached the house. Gerard entered with a beating heart. He knew Fra Colonna was a great judge of good work, and he feared lest his own might be poor. The room was strewed and heaped with objects of art, antiquity, and learning; and in the midst of pictures, manuscripts, and carvings in wood and ivory, sat the owner.

He looked up and saw Gerard. 'Young man,' said he, 'show me how you write.'

Gerard brought the work to him in fear and trembling; then stood, heart-sick, awaiting his verdict.

The great man gave one look at the writing, and then embraced Gerard and praised him as the best writer he had ever seen!

From this time Gerard's success was assured. Fra Colonna was charmed with his new artist, and since he knew half the palaces of Rome, soon got him work from many princes and nobles.

'These people can pay you three times as much as I can,' he told Gerard, 'and they shall too!'

Much higher prices were current for copying than authorship ever obtained for centuries under the printing press. In the rage for Greek manuscripts Gerard soon became a great favourite. The compliments he received from his noble patrons would have turned a vain fellow's head, but Gerard was working with one object only—to earn enough money to enable him to go back to Margaret in Holland. He put aside what he earned, and made no change in his frugal way of life, but counted the days till he should be rich enough to return.

Greater honours still were in store. The Pope himself sent for him. He was taken up a private stair into a luxurious room in the Vatican, the Pope's vast palace, where he found inkstands, sloping frames for writing, and all the instruments of art. Presently the Pope's private secretary appeared with a glorious old manuscript of Plutarch's *Lives*. And soon Gerard was seated alone, copying it, awestruck, yet half delighted at the thought that his holiness the Pope would handle his work and read it.

Here he came and worked every day, and once the door opened, and in walked the Pope himself, a venerable old man in a purple cap, with a beard like white silk, and a kind smile.

Gerard fell on his knees, but the Pope bade him rise. 'I came not into this corner to be in state,' he said. 'How goes Plutarch?'

Gerard brought his work, and kneeling on one knee presented it to his holiness, who had seated himself. His holiness inspected it with interest. 'Tis excellently written,' said he, and Gerard's heart beat with delight.

CHAPTER 31

Gerard's constancy endangers his life. Bad news from home.

One afternoon, when Gerard had finished his day's work, a fine servant came and demanded his attendance at a certain palace. He went, and was ushered into a noble apartment; there was a girl seated in it, working on

tapestry. She rose and left the room, and said she would let her mistress know he had come.

A good hour did Gerard wait in that great room, and at last he began to fret. 'These nobles think nothing of a poor fellow's time.' However, just as he was making up his mind to slip out, the door opened, and a superb beauty entered the room, followed by two maids. It was the young princess of the great family of Caesarini. She came in talking rather loudly and haughtily to her dependents, but at sight of Gerard lowered her voice and said, 'Are you the writer?'

'I am, my lady.'

'Tis well.' She then seated herself; Gerard and her maids remained standing.

She asked him his name, and many other questions, and told him she wished him to write a letter for her. However, she changed her mind when Gerard had taken out his paper and ink; she could not think of anything for him to write in the letter. Finding out that Gerard could paint and draw, as well as write, she bade him paint her portrait. Gerard had not brought his colours with him, but he drew her head with pencil, and they were all delighted.

'How like! and done in a moment!' cried the maids.

The princess sent for him every day after this, and he painted portrait after portrait of her, for her beauty and vanity were prodigious. Thus the thriving Gerard found a new and fruitful source of income.

It seemed as if good fairies watched over him. Baskets of choice provisions and fruits were brought to his door by porters who knew not who had employed them, or affected ignorance; and one day came a jewel in a letter, but no words.

At this point the suspicions of his landlady broke out. 'This is none of your patrons, silly boy; this is some lady that has fallen in love with your sweet face,' she said.

Gerard laughed at the idea, but he was soon to find out the truth. Destitute of vanity and experience, wrapped up in his thoughts of Margaret and his art, Gerard had not seen that the beautiful princess Claelia was fascinated by his handsome face and gentle ways. But one day when he was sitting painting her portrait, she dismissed her

maids, and asked him if he remembered the first day he came to her palace.

' 'Twas to write a letter to a prince who would marry me. Shall I tell you ? It was the sight of you, and your pretty ways, and your wise words, made me hate him on the instant. I liked the fool well enough before ; or thought I liked him. Tell me how many times you have been since then. Ah ! you know not ; you love me not as I love you. Eighteen times, Gerard. And each time dearer to me. The day you come not 'tis night, not day, to Claelia. Alas ! I speak for both. Cruel boy, am I not worth a word ? Have you every day a princess at your feet ? Nay, speak to me, Gerard.'

' Lady,' faltered Gerard, ' what can I say, that were not better left unsaid ? Oh, evil day that ever I came here ! '

' Ah ! say not so. 'Twas the brightest day ever shone on me ; or indeed on you. I'll make you confess as much ere long, ungrateful one.'

' Your highness,' began Gerard, in a low, pleading voice ; ' I am too young and too little wise to know how I ought to speak to you, so as not to seem blind nor yet ungrateful. But this I know ; I would be both naught and ungrateful, and the worst foe you ever had, did I take advantage of this mad fancy. Surely some evil spirit afflicts you. For it is unnatural that a princess adorned with every grace should wish to wed with one of low degree.'

' You fear the daggers of my kinsmen,' said she, half sadly, half contemptuously.

' No more than I fear the bodkins of your women,' said Gerard haughtily. ' But I fear God and the saints and my own conscience.'

' The truth, Gerard, the truth ! Hypocrisy looks not well in you. Princesses, while they are young, are not despised for love of God, but of some other woman. Tell me whom you love ; and if she is worthy of you I will forgive you.'

' None in Italy,' said Gerard.

' Ah ! there is one somewhere, then. Where ? Where ? '

' In Holland, my native country ; Princess, she whom I love is not noble. She is as I am. Nor is she so fair as you. Yet she is fair, and linked to my heart for ever by her virtues, and by all the dangers and griefs we have borne

together and for one another. Forgive me ; but I would not wrong my Margaret for all the highest dames in Italy.' The slighted beauty started to her feet and stood opposite to him, as beautiful but far more terrible than ever before. Her cheeks were pale, and her eyes full of fury.

' This to my face, unmannered wretch,' she cried. ' Was I born to be insulted, as well as scorned, by such as you ? Beware ! We nobles brook no rivals. Think which is better : the love of a princess, or her hate ; for after all I have said, it must be love or hate between us, and to the death. Choose now ! '

Gerard looked up in awe and wonder at her wrath. But he was firm as he thought of Margaret, and replied as calmly as he could, ' Which you will, Princess. As for me, I will neither love you nor hate you ; but, with your permission, I will leave you.' And he rose abruptly.

She was pale as death, and said, ' Before you leave me so, know your fate ; outside that door are armed men who wait to slay you at a word from me.'

' But you will not speak that word ? '

' That word I will speak. Nay, more, I shall noise it abroad that it was for offering love to me that you were slain ; and a cunning messenger, well taught his lesson, shall go to Holland, and your lover shall know your death, and think you faithless ; now, go to your grave ; a dog's. For a man you are not ! '

Gerard turned pale and was dumb. Then at the thought of what awful grief Margaret would suffer, he threw himself at her feet, and poured out in one torrent of eloquence the story of his love and Margaret's. How he had been imprisoned, hunted with blood-hounds, driven to exile for her ; how she had shed her blood for him, and now pined at home. How he had walked through Europe, surrounded by perils, torn by savage brutes, attacked by furious men with sword and axe and trap, robbed, shipwrecked for her.

The princess trembled and tried to get away from him ; but he held her robe, he clung to her, he made her hear his pitiful story and Margaret's. No woman could resist such pleading. She began to waver and sigh, and her fiery eyes filled with tears.

' You conquer me,' she sobbed. ' You, or my better angel. Leave Rome ! '

‘ I will, I will.’

‘ If you breathe a word of my folly, it will be your last.’

‘ Think not so poorly of me. You are my benefactress once more. Is it for me to slander you ? ’

‘ Go ! I will send you the means. I know myself ; if you cross my path again, I shall kill you. Farewell ; my heart is broken.’

She touched a little silver bell. One of the maids came in. ‘ Take him,’ said she, in a choked voice, ‘ safe out of the house by the side way.’

He turned at the door ; she was leaning with one hand on a chair, crying, with averted head. Then he thought only of her kindness, and ran back and kissed her robe. She never moved.

Once clear of the house he darted home, thanking heaven for his escape. He told his landlady that one of the nobles sought to kill him. She advised him to change his lodgings and keep quiet for a while.

So he did ; and as he had but little to occupy him now, he set himself resolutely to read through that parchment deed which he had always carried about with him since first he came upon it at Tergou. He mastered it, and saw that it related to a loan of money upon certain land, which loan must have been paid over and over again by the rents, and that Ghysbrecht was keeping Peter and Margaret out of their own land.

‘ Fool ! not to have read this before,’ he cried. He hired a horse and rode down to the nearest port. A vessel was to sail for Amsterdam in four days. He took a passage in it, and paid a small sum to secure it.

‘ The land is too full of cut-throats for me,’ said he ; ‘ and ’tis lovely fair weather for the sea. Our Dutch sailors are not shipwrecked like these bungling Italians.’

When he returned home there sat his landlady with her eyes sparkling. ‘ You are in luck, my young master,’ said she. ‘ All the fish run to your net this day, methinks. See what a servant hath brought ! this bag and this note.’

Gerard broke the seals, and found the bag full of silver crowns. The note contained but one word, ‘ Remember.’

‘ Fear me not !’ said Gerard aloud, ‘ I’ll not forget that promise !’

‘ What is that ? ’ asked the landlady.

'Oh, nothing. Am I not happy, dame? I am going back to my Margaret with money in one pocket and land in the other. Nothing could make me happier than to be there in Holland.'

'Well, that is a pity, for I thought to make you a little happier with a letter from Holland.'

'A letter? for me? where? how? who brought it? Oh, dame!'

The old woman told him that a stranger had brought it from a Dutch ship. Gerard took the letter, almost wild with delight.

'Alas! it is not from Margaret. This is not her writing. Whose hand is this? surely I have seen it? I believe it is my dear friend the Lady Van Eyck.'

Gerard tore open the envelope, expecting to find in it a letter from Margaret. He was sadly disappointed. Very briefly the letter told him that Margaret was dead!

CHAPTER 32

Gerard goes through deep waters.

FOR a long time after that dreadful shock Gerard was like a madman. At first he could not believe the news; it seemed too awful even in a world of many sorrows. Then, when his mind came to realize that death spares none, he gave way to utter despair. The simple women of the house tried their best to comfort him, but his sorrow was past consolation. He fell into a fever and lay for long unconscious. The deadlier symptoms succeeded one another rapidly. On the fifth day the doctor retired and gave him up. On the sunset of that same day he fell into a deep sleep.

Some said he would wake only to die. But an old woman of much experience in nursing the sick, declared that his youth might save him yet, could he sleep twelve hours. On which his old landlady cleared the room and watched him alone.

He slept twelve hours.

The good woman rejoiced; but when he had slept thirty

hours, she began to doubt and sent for the old nurse, who inspected him closely for some time.

‘His breath is even, his hand moist. We must have sense to leave nature alone. When did sleep ever harm the racked brain or the torn heart?’

Only two men were admitted to the room, Gerard’s friends Fra Colonna and Fra Jerome, the huge priest who had helped him to escape from the wrecked ship.

At about the sixtieth hour of this strange sleep Gerard opened his eyes and stared. He drew himself up a little in his bed. He noticed his friend Colonna, and smiled with pleasure. But in the middle of smiling his face stopped and was convulsed in a moment with anguish unspeakable, and he uttered a loud cry and turned his face to the wall.

His friends tried to comfort him. Fra Jerome gravely told him, ‘The Church alone gives repose to the heart on earth, and happiness to the soul hereafter. Consecrate thy gifts to her! The Church is peace of mind.’

He spoke these words solemnly at the door, and was gone as soon as they were uttered.

‘The Church!’ cried Gerard, rising furiously and shaking his fist after the friar. ‘Malediction on the Church! But for the Church I should not lie broken here, and she lie cold, cold in Holland. O my Margaret! O my darling! my darling! Oh! had I been there I would have saved her. Idiot! Idiot! to leave her for a moment!’

He wept bitterly a long time. Then he rose and put on his clothes. The old landlady came in and found him. She remonstrated; he was not fit to go out.

‘What avails my lying here?’ said he gloomily. ‘Can I find here that which I seek?’

‘Is he mad again?’ cried the anxious dame. ‘What seek you?’

‘Oblivion!’

And with that the miserable creature walked out with feeble limbs and pale face, all drawn down as if by age.

Now a dark cloud fell on that noble mind. He was a prey to despair, but also to anger that all his self-denial endurance, perils, virtue, had been wasted, and worse than wasted; for it kept burning and stinging him that had he stayed lazily, selfishly at home he would have saved his Margaret’s life.

These two poisons, raging together in his young blood, maddened and demoralized him. He rushed fiercely into pleasure. And in those days even more than now pleasures were vicious.

He plunged into all kinds of excesses to procure an hour's excitement and a moment's oblivion. He squandered with riotous companions the large sums he had saved up for Margaret. He was soon the leader of comrades he would before have despised.

It is not our business to paint at full length the scenes of coarse vice in which this unhappy young man now played a part. But it is our business to impress the broad truth that he was a gambler and a drunkard, and one of the wildest, loosest, and wickedest young men in Rome. They are no lovers of truth, nor of mankind, who conceal the wickedness into which the good may fall, and so by their want of candour rob despondent sinners of hope.

One day he was in a boat on the Tiber with some of his wild companions. Turning a corner they nearly ran into a galley drifting slowly down the stream; in it sat the Princess Claelia under a canopy, with courtiers and dependants standing behind her. Gerard blushed at her seeing him in such company. And from that hour another phase of his misery began—remorse!

Broken health—means wasted—innocence fled; Margaret seemed parted from him by more than death.

Then this miserable young man spurned his gay companions, and all the world. He wandered alone at night by dark streams and eyed them sadly. There glided peace, it seemed to him. What else was left him? Such dark moods have been broken by kind words, by loving and cheerful voices. But none of his old friends knew where to find him. One eye only was upon him, watching his every movement, and that eye was the eye of an enemy.

The Princess Claelia had recognized him on the river. Then he had not left Rome, he had not fulfilled his promise; perhaps he had spoken of her jestingly to those low companions of his! The thought stung her to fury.

She sent for one of those assassins who were to be hired in Rome. The man was shown into her apartment where she sat, her face hidden with a black mask.

'They have told you for what you are wanted?'

‘Yes, your highness.’

He asked the name of the man who was to be killed.

‘Listen,’ said she. ‘It is a young man, tall of stature, with auburn hair, dark blue eyes, and an honest face that would deceive a saint. Yet he is a base traitor.’ She added a description of where he dwelt. The assassin listened with all his ears. ‘It is enough,’ said he; ‘stay, does he haunt any place where I may deal with him?’

‘My spy reports that he has of late frequented the banks of Tiber after dusk; even there slay him, and let my rival come and find him; the smooth, heartless, insolent traitor!’

The man lingered.

‘Ah, I forgot; your revenge is bought. Here is more than half the price,’ and she pushed a bag across the table to him. ‘When the blow is struck, come for the rest.’

‘You will soon see me again, your highness.’ And he retired, bowing low.

So the princess hired an assassin’s dagger against a poor, forlorn wretch just meditating suicide.

CHAPTER 33

How death was sought at the hands of a would-be assassin.

It happened two days after this scene that Gerard was wandering through one of the meanest streets in Rome. He had resolved to end his life that night. He had left a note in his rooms to inform the young men with whom he lodged, and had stolen down to the river at nightfall. He looked round to see that no one was about, when, to his annoyance, he saw a single figure leaning against the corner of an alley. So he affected to stroll carelessly away, but returned to the spot; and lo! the same figure emerged from a side street and loitered about:

‘Can he be watching me? Can he know what I am here for?’ thought Gerard. ‘Impossible.’

He strode briskly off, walked along a street or two, and came back.

The man had vanished. But lo! on Gerard’s looking

all round to make sure, there he was a few yards behind, apparently fastening his shoe. Gerard saw he was watched, and at this moment observed in the moonlight a steel dagger in his watcher's hand.

Then he knew it was an assassin.

Strange to say, it never occurred to him that his was the life aimed at. He turned and walked up to the assassin. 'My good friend,' said he eagerly, 'sell me thine arm! a single stroke! See here is all I have,' and he forced his money into the man's hand. 'Oh, I pray thee, do one good deed and rid me of my hateful life!' and even while speaking he undid his doublet and bared his bosom.

The man stared in his face.

'Why do you hesitate?' shrieked Gerard; 'is it so much trouble to lift your arm and let it fall? Is it because I am poor and can't give you gold? Useless wretch, you can only strike a man behind; not look one in the face. Stand back and hold your tongue!' And with a snarl of contempt he ran from him and flung himself into the water, crying 'Margaret'. At the heavy plunge of Gerard's body in the stream, the man seemed to recover from a stupor. He ran to the bank, and with a strange cry the assassin plunged in after the self-destroyer.

CHAPTER 34

How Ludovico became a porter, and Gerard Brother Clement.

IN the guest chamber of a Dominican convent lay a single stranger, exhausted by violent fits of nausea which had at last subsided. A huge wood fire burned on the hearth and beside it hung the patient's clothes.

A gigantic friar sat by his bedside reading from the sacred books.

The patient at times eyed him and seemed to listen; at others closed his eyes and moaned.

The monk kneeled down with his face touching the ground and prayed for him; then rose and bade him farewell. 'Day breaks,' said he, 'I must prepare for morning prayer.'

'Good Father Jerome, before you go, how came I hither?'

'By the hand of heaven. You flung away God's gift. He bestowed it on you again. Think upon it!'

He was gone, and Gerard lay back wondering, and fell into a doze.

When he awoke again he found a new nurse seated beside him. It was a man with an eye as small and restless as Friar Jerome's was calm and majestic. The man inquired earnestly how he felt.

'Very, very weak. Where have I seen you before, sir?'

'None the worse for my blow?' inquired the other, with considerable anxiety; 'I was fain to strike you, or both you and I should be at the bottom of Tiber.'

Gerard stared at him. 'What, 'twas you saved me? How?'

'Well, sir, I was by the banks of Tiber on—on—an errand, no matter what. You came to me and begged hard for a dagger stroke. But ere I could oblige you, aye, even as you spoke to me, I knew you for the gentleman that saved my wife and child upon the sea.'

'It is Teresa's husband! And an assassin!!'

'At your service. Well, Sir Gerard, the next thing was that you flung yourself into Tiber, and bade me hold aloof.'

'I remember that.'

'Had it been any but you, believe me I had obeyed you, and not wagged a finger. Men are my foes. They may all drown in one river for all I care. But when you, sinking in Tiber, cried, "Margaret!", my heart cried "Teresa!" How could I go home and look her in the face, if I let you die, and by the very death you saved her from? So in I went; and luckily for us both I swim like a duck. You, seeing me so near, and being bent on destruction, tried to grip me and so end us both. But I swam round you and (receive my excuses) so buffeted you on the back of the neck, that you lost sense, and I with much trouble, the stream being strong, drew your body to land, but insensible and full of water. Then I took you on my back and made for my home. "Teresa will nurse him and be pleased with me," thought I. But, hard by this

monastery, a holy friar, the biggest ever I saw, met us and asked the matter. So I told him. He looked hard at you. "I know the face," quoth he. "'Tis one Gerard, a fair youth from Holland." Then said he, "He hath friends among our brethren. Leave him with us. Charity is our work." Also he told me that the convent had better means to tend you than I had. And that was true. So I just bargained to be let in to see you once a day, and here you are.

And the miscreant cast a strange look of affection and interest upon Gerard.

Gerard did not respond to it. He felt as if a snake were in the room. He closed his eyes.

'Ah, you would sleep,' said the man eagerly. 'I go.' And he retired on tiptoe with a promise to come every day.

Gerard lay with his eyes closed; not asleep but deeply pondering.

Saved from death by an assassin!

Was not this the finger of heaven? Of that heaven he had insulted, cursed, and defied. He shuddered at his impieties. He tried to pray, and wept.

And even as he wept, there beamed on him the sweet and reverend face of one he had never thought to see again. It was the face of Father Anselm, the good monk who had tended his wounded leg in the monastery of Juliers.

Anselm sat down by the bedside, and putting a gentle hand on his head, first calmed him with a soothing word or two. He then spoke to him kindly but solemnly, and made him feel the crime of what he had done, and urged him to repentance and gratitude to that Divine Power which had thwarted his desire to destroy himself. And soon Gerard was at Father Anselm's knees confessing his every sin with sighs and groans of penitence.

And now Gerard turned with terror and aversion from the world, and begged passionately to remain in the convent. He wished only to become a monk and devote himself to prayer and meditation and the relief of suffering humanity.

One of Gerard's self-imposed penances was to receive Ludovico kindly. Never was self-denial better bestowed. Finding it so sweet to save life, the miscreant next

became averse to taking it; next came remorse; and after remorse something very like penitence. And here Teresa helped by threatening to leave him unless he would consent to lead an honest life. The good fathers of the convent lent their aid, and Ludovico and Teresa were sent by sea to Leghorn where Teresa had friends, and the assassin settled down and became a porter. He found it miserably dull work at first, and said so!

Meanwhile the Princess Claelia had quickly repented of her revenge upon Gerard, which she thought had been carried out, since her spies brought her word that Gerard was no more seen in the streets of Rome. She fell into a profound melancholy and sent for a priest to comfort her. To him she confessed her act. Now it happened that the priest was Fra Jerome, whom we know as a stern man devoted only to his duty. He had no fear of princesses! He showed her in a few grim words that her sin had been very great and bade her take off all her jewels and go barefoot on a pilgrimage to a famous shrine in northern Italy, and to tell her crime to all holy friars she might meet on the way. The poor princess agreed to expiate her sin thus, but obtained leave to wear a mask that none might see her face.

So that marvellous occurrence by Tiber's banks left its mark on all the actors in it. The assassin, softened by saving the life he was paid to take, turned from the dagger to the porter's knot. The princess went barefoot on pilgrimage, weeping her crime and washing the feet of base-born men. And Gerard, carried from the Tiber into that convent a suicide, now passed for a young saint within its walls.

Loving but experienced eyes were on him. After a shorter probation than usual he was made a priest, and soon after took the monastic vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and became a friar of the Order of St. Dominic.

Dead to the world, the monk parted with the very name by which he had lived in it, and so broke the last link of association with earthly feelings.

Here then Gerard ended, and Brother Clement began.

CHAPTER 35

Brother Clement travels north and preaches a sermon
at Rotterdam.

THE zeal and accomplishments of Clement, especially his rare mastery of languages (for he spoke Latin, Italian, French, and Dutch), soon became known to his superiors in the monastery, and he was destined to travel and preach in England.

But ere that, it was thought wise to train him and try him lest he might be tempted after earthly weaknesses. He was put under Fra Jerome. That stern teacher took him to many death-beds, and into noisome dungeons; places where the darkness was appalling, and the stench loathsome; and men looking like wild beasts lay coiled in rags and filth and despair. It tried his body hard; but the soul collected all its powers to comfort such poor wretches there as were not past comfort.

He was taken to executions, and was sickened by the sight; but Fra Jerome bade him up and preach to the people while their hearts were touched by the spectacle of crime's punishment. At first his throat seemed parched, his heart thumped, his voice trembled. But by and by the sight of the eager upturned faces, and his own zeal, fired the pale monk, and he delivered an eloquent appeal to the people to mend their ways and turn to God.

Fra Jerome was astonished at his power. He was an orator born, it seemed.

Soon he was told to go to England with Fra Jerome. Clement folded his hands on his breast and bowed his head in calm submission. He was to go first to Basle, preaching on the way. He passed out of the northern gate of Rome with his eyes lowered, and the whole man wrapped in pious contemplation.

The traveller was on foot again. But all was changed; no perilous adventures now. The very thieves and robbers bowed to the ground before him, and instead of robbing him forced stolen money on him and begged his prayers.

At a town in Tuscany the friar had a strange and sudden reminder of the past. He fell in with a company of pilgrims.

They were in an immense barn belonging to the inn. Clement, dusty and wearied, and no lover of idle gossip, sat in a corner studying his book.

Presently a servant brought a bucket half full of water, and put it down at his feet. A maid followed with two towels. And then a woman came forward, kneeled down without a word at the bucket-side, and motioned to him to put his feet in the water. It was some lady of rank doing penance. She wore a mask. Moreover, she handled the friar's feet more delicately than those do who are born to such offices.

These penances were not uncommon; and Clement received the services of this unknown as a matter of course. But presently she sighed deeply, and with head bent low over her menial task, she seemed so bowed with penitence that he pitied her, and said calmly but gently, 'Can I do aught for your soul's welfare, daughter?'

She shook her head with a faint sob. 'Naught, holy father, naught: only to hear the sin of her who is most unworthy to touch thy holy feet. 'Tis part of my penance to tell sinless men how vile I am.'

'Speak, my daughter.'

'Father,' said the lady, bending lower and lower, 'these hands of mine look white, but they are stained with blood,—the blood of the man I loved.'

Gerard kept very still and she told all her pitiful story. It was the Princess Claelia!

When she had finished, Clement told her that he too had been a great sinner. 'But, daughter, the Church sends you comfort.'

'Comfort to me? ah, never! unless it can raise my victim from the dead!'

Then Clement told her how Gerard had not been killed by the assassin but saved from death by him, and had become a friar.

She raised her head slowly and peered at him through her mask.

The next moment she uttered a faint shriek, and lay with her brow upon his bare feet.

Then Clement raised her up and said, 'My daughter, take comfort. Torment thyself no more about this Gerard who is not. As for me, I am brother Clement, whom Heaven

hath sent to thee this day to comfort thee, and help thee save thy soul. Thou hast confessed to me thy sin. I claim, then, thy obedience.'

'Oh, yes,' sobbed the penitent.

'Leave this pilgrimage, and instantly return to Rome. Call to mind thy sin and God's goodness; and so be humble and gentle to the faults of those around thee. The world courts the rich, but seek thou the poor; not beggars, those for the most are neither honest nor truly poor. But rather find out those who seek thee not, yet need thee sorely. And I do entreat and command thee to marry one that feareth God. Wedding a worthy husband, thou mayest live a pious princess, and die a saint.'

And so they parted. The monk erect, his eyes turned heavenwards, and glowing with the sacred fire of zeal; the princess slowly retiring and turning more than once to cast a lingering glance of awe and tender regret on that inspired figure. She went home subdued and purified. Clement, in due course, reached Basle and entered on the duty of teaching at the university, and preaching in the town and neighbourhood.

Here he had been more than a year, growing in knowledge and holiness, when Jerome came one day to take him on to England with him.

The two friars went down the Rhine, preaching on the way, sometimes drifting a few miles on the stream, but in general walking by the banks. They reached the town of Dusseldorf and Clement saw the little quay where he and Denys had taken boat up the Rhine. Nothing had changed but he who walked through the town now barefoot, his eyes meekly bent on the ground.

Here the two friars parted company to go by different ways to Rotterdam and there meet and take ship to England.

When Clement reached the port he looked for Jerome but saw him not. He met some monks of his own order and they gave him a note. Jerome had gone on without him. He wrote that Clement might follow if he pleased, but he would do much better to stay behind and preach to his own country folk. The letter ended with these words:

'Know thou that on the way I met one, who asked

for thee under the name thou didst bear in the world. Be on thy guard ! Let not the world catch thee again by any silken net. And remember, Solitude, Fasting, and Prayer are the sword, spear, and shield against evil. Farewell !'

Clement was surprised at this cold letter, but Jerome was ever stern. He promised the good monks to sleep at the convent, and to preach wherever they should appoint. Then he withdrew, for he was hurt by the desertion of Jerome. 'Why,' said he to himself, 'worldly hearts are no colder nor less trusty than this. The only one that ever really loved me lies in a grave hard by. I will go to Sevenbergen and pray over her grave.'

Three hours later he passed Peter's cottage. A troop of noisy children were playing about the door, and the house had been repaired. He turned away and went to the churchyard. He sought among the tombstones for Margaret's. He could not find it.

Coming out he saw a very old man looking over the little churchyard gate. He went towards him and asked him how long he had lived in the place.

'Four score and twelve years,' answered he. 'And I come here every day of late, holy father, to see where I soon must lie.'

'My son, can you tell me where Margaret lies ?'

'Margaret ? There be many Margarets here.'

'Margaret Brandt. She was daughter to a learned physician.'

'As if I didn't know that,' said the old man peevishly. 'But she does not lie here. They left this place a long while ago. Gone in a moment and the house empty. What, is she dead ? Margaret and Peter dead ? Now only think of it. Like enough ; like enough. Those great towns do terribly disagree with country folk.'

'What great towns, my son ?'

'Well, 'twas Rotterdam they went to from here, so I heard.' And the old man went on to talk, but Clement's heart was too sorrowful for him to listen. 'God bless thee, my son,' said he ; 'farewell !' and hurried away.

He reached the convent at sunset, and watched and prayed in the chapel till it was long past midnight, and his soul had recovered its cold calm.

The next Sunday he was to preach in the great church of Rotterdam in the afternoon. As Clement mounted the pulpit to preach to the people, his eye fell on the great aisle crammed with his country folk ; a thousand snowy-white caps, broidered with gold. Many a hundred miles he had travelled, but he had seen nothing like them except snow. His heart went out to those people ; he spoke gently and earnestly of God's love for man, and the people listened, charmed with his eloquence.

He turned about that all might hear him well wherever they were sitting. And there in a stream of sunshine from the window was the radiant face of Margaret Brandt ! He gazed at it without emotion. It just benumbed him.

But soon the words died in his throat, and he trembled as he stared at the face. There with her golden hair bathed in sunbeams, and glittering like a saint's, stood his dead love.

She was leaning very lightly against a white column. She was listening with tender, downcast eyes. There was no change in her. This was the same Margaret he had left ; only a shade older and more lovely. He stared at her with bloodless cheeks.

The people died out of his sight. He heard, as in a dream, a rustling and rising all over the church ; but could not take his eyes off that face, all life and bloom and beauty.

He gazed, thinking she must vanish : but she remained.

All in a moment she was looking at him, full. At this he was beside himself, and his lips parted to shriek out her name, when she turned her head swiftly, and soon after vanished.

He made a mighty effort and muttered something nobody could understand ; then feebly resumed his discourse. He stammered and babbled on awhile, till by degrees forcing himself, now she was out of sight, to look on it as a vision from another world, he rose into a state of unnatural excitement, and concluded in a style of eloquence that amazed his simple hearers. The sermon ended, he sat down, terribly shaken. But presently an idea very characteristic of the time took possession of him. He had sought her grave at Sevenbergen in vain. She had now been permitted to appear to him, and show him that

she was buried here ; probably close to the pillar where her spirit had appeared to him.

This idea soon settled on his mind with all the certainty of a fact. He felt he had only to speak to the sexton, whom he could see digging a grave outside, to learn the spot where she was laid.

CHAPTER 36

Clement speaks with an old acquaintance, and hears of foul play.

THE church was now quite empty. Clement came down from the pulpit, and went out into the graveyard to the sexton. He knew him in a moment. It was Jorian who had once saved him when the men came to capture him in Peter's house. But Jorian did not recognize that Gerard in this holy friar. The loss of his beard had wonderfully altered the outline of his face. This had changed him even more than his tonsure,¹ his short hair sprinkled with premature grey, and his cheeks thinned and paled by fasts and vigils.

'My son,' said friar Clement softly, 'if you keep any memory of those whom you lay in the earth, I pray you tell me whether any is buried inside the church, near one of the pillars ?'

'Nay, father,' said Jorian, 'here in the churchyard lie buried all that buried be. Why ?'

'No matter. Tell me then where lieth Margaret Brandt.'

'Margaret Brandt ?' And Jorian stared stupidly at the speaker.

'She died about three years ago, and was buried here. Her father, Peter, was a learned physician ; she came hither from Sevenbergen—to die.'

Jorian stood up in the grave that he was digging and stared.

Then he said : 'I have it ; 'tis Peter Brandt's grave you would fain see, not Margaret's. He does lie here. I'll show you the tomb.'

And he laid down his spade, and put on his coat to go

¹ A shaven spot on the crown of the head.

with the friar, talking the while ; ' They used to call him a magician out at Sevenbergen. And they do say he gave them a show of his skill at dying ; he said he saw Margaret's Gerard coming down the Rhine, but strangely altered. But nothing came of it. Margaret is still waiting for her lad ; and Peter lies as quiet as his neighbours, as you shall see.

In a low whisper Clement asked him : ' How long since Peter Brandt died ? '

' About two months. Why ? '

' And his daughter buried him ? '

' Nay, I buried him, but she paid the fee.'

' Then you think Margaret is—is alive ? '

' Think ? why I should be dead else ! ' said Jorian, and proceeded, ' She saved my life six weeks ago. Now, had she been dead, she couldn't have kept me alive, do you see ? I was very ill and doctors did me no good. In comes this lady Margaret and cures me in a minute. And with what ? Why, with a common herb out of my own garden. A herb, said I ? Nay, a weed ; it was a weed till it cured me ; but now whene'er I pass a bunch of it I take off my cap and say " My service to you ". Why, father, you look wondrous pale. Why, what is the matter ? '

' The surprise—the joy—the wonder—the fear,' gasped Clement.

' Why what is it to you ? Are you kin to Margaret Brandt ? '

' Nay ; but I knew one that loved her well, so well that her death nigh killed him, body and soul. And yet you say she lives. And I believe you.'

Jorian stared, and after a considerable silence, said very gravely, ' Father, you have asked me many questions, and I have answered them truly ; now answer me but two. Did you in very truth know one who loved this poor girl ? Where ? '

Clement was on the point of revealing himself, but he remembered Jerome's letter, and shrank from being called by the name he had borne in the world.

' I knew him in Italy,' said he.

' If you knew him you can tell me his name,' said Jorian, cautiously.

' His name was Gerard, son of Elias.'

'Oh, but this is strange. Stay, what made you say Margaret Brandt was dead?'

'I was with Gerard when a letter came from the Lady Van Eyck. The letter told him she he loved was dead and buried. Let me sit down for my strength fails me. Foul play! Foul play!'

'Father,' said Jorian, 'I thank Heaven for sending you to me. Aye, sit ye down; ye do look like a ghost; ye fast overmuch to be strong. My mind misgives me; I think I hold the clue to this riddle, and if I do, there be two knaves in this town whose heads I would fain batter to pieces! Foul play? You never said a truer word in your life; and if you know where Gerard is now, lose no time, but show him the trap they have laid for him.' Jorian, then, after some of those useless preliminaries men of his class always deal in, came to the point of his story. He had been employed by the burgomaster of Tergou to repair the floor of an upper room in his house, and when it was almost done, coming suddenly to fetch away his tools, his curiosity had been excited by some loud words below, and he had lain down on his stomach, and heard the burgomaster talking about a letter, which Cornelis and Sybrandt were minded to put in the place of one that the Lady Van Eyck was sending to Gerard. And it seems their will was good, but their courage was small; so to give them courage, the old man showed them a drawer full of silver, and if they did the trick they should each put a hand in it and have all the silver they could hold.' The next day Jorian went to his hiding-place again. 'Well, father, the burgomaster brought them into the same room. He had a letter in his hand; I am no scholar, but I have got as many eyes in my head as the Pope hath, and I saw the drawer opened, and those two knaves put in each a hand and draw it out full. And how they tried to hold more and more and more of that stuff! So you see luck was on the wrong side as usual; they had done the trick; but how they did it, that will never be known I think.'

It was clear now; Cornelis and Sybrandt had intercepted a letter of Margaret's written by Lady Van Eyck and substituted another in which they wrote that Margaret was dead; they did not want Gerard to return and share

their father's money when he should die; the burgo-master helped them for fear that, if Gerard returned with the deed he had taken away, his stolen lands would have to be returned and his roguery made known to the world.

Jorian continued, 'There, father, that is off my mind; often I longed to tell it to some one, but I durst not to the women, or Margaret would not have had a friend left in the world; for those two black-hearted villains are the favourites. 'Tis always so. Have not the old folk just taken a fine new shop for them in this very town, in the Hoog Street? There may you see their sign, a gilt sheep. And there the whole family feast this day; oh, 'tis a fine world. What, not a word, holy father? You sit there like a stone and have not even a curse to bestow on them, the stony-hearted miscreants. What, was it not enough that the poor lad was all alone in a strange land; must his own flesh and blood go and lie away the one blessing his enemies had left him? And then think of her pining and pining all these years and sitting at the window looking down the street for Gerard! And so constant, so tender and true; my wife says she is sure no woman ever loved a man truer than Margaret loves the lad those villains have parted from her; and the day never passes but she weeps salt tears for him. And when I think that, but for those two greedy lying knaves, you good lad, whose life I saved, might be by her side this day, and they two the happiest pair in all Holland; oh, then I thirst for their blood, the sneaking, lying, cowardly, heartless—how now?'

The monk started wildly up, livid with fury and despair, and rushed headlong from the place with both hands clenched and raised on high. So terrible was this dumb burst of fury that Jorian's anger died out at sight of it, and he stood looking dismayed after the human tempest he had roused. While thus absorbed he felt his arm grasped by a small tremulous hand.

It was Margaret Brandt.

He started; her coming there just then seemed so strange.

Margaret had gone to the church that afternoon to hear the preaching of the friar who, men said, was so eloquent. In the midst of the sermon she had recognized him; it was Gerard. At that moment he had seemed

to recognize her, and his words failed ; people round her looked upon her strangely and rose in their places ; she slipped behind a pillar, and after a pause the friar had gone on with his sermon. She had walked outside the church to wait for him.

And now she saw him striding off furiously in the distance. Jorian told her of their conversation, and said that he was gone, most likely, to the Hoog Street.

' Oh, Jorian, what have you done ? ' cried Margaret. ' Quick, quick ! help me thither, for the power is all gone out of my body. You know him not as I do. Oh, if you had seen the blow he gave Ghysbrecht, and heard the fearful crash ! Come, save him from worse mischief now.'

Jorian was astonished. ' I talk of this friar and you answer me of Gerard.'

' Man, see you not, *this* is Gerard !'

Now Jorian understood. They hurried on ; none could tell what that furious friar, once Gerard, might do to Cornelis and Sybrandt.

They were now within twenty yards of the shop when they heard a roar inside, as of some wild animal, and the friar burst out, white and raging, and went tearing down the street.

Margaret screamed, and sank fainting on Jorian's arm.

Jorian shouted after him, ' Stay, madman, know thy friends.'

But he was deaf and went headlong, shaking his clenched fists high in the air.

' Help me in, good Jorian,' moaned Margaret, turning suddenly calm. ' Let me know the worst, and die.'

He supported her into the house.

It seemed unnaturally still ; not a sound could be heard.

CHAPTER 37

The Friar deals with his brothers, and attends to the Burgomaster's conscience.

It was supper-time. Eli's family were collected round the table for the feast in honour of the new shop for Cornelis and Sybrandt ; Margaret only was missing. To Catherine's surprise, Eli said he would wait a bit for

her. But the smoking dishes smelt so savoury that he gave way. 'She will come if we begin,' said he, 'they always do. Come, sit down. There, I hear a quick step; 'tis Margaret; begin.'

Then burst into the room, not the expected Margaret, but a Dominican friar, livid with rage. He was at the table in a moment, in front of Cornelis and Sybrandt, threw his tall body over the narrow table, and with two hands hovering above their shrinking heads, like eagles over a prey, he cursed them by name, soul and body, in this world and the next. It was an age eloquent in curses; and this curse was so full, so minute, so blighting, and tremendous, that I am afraid to put it into words.

Then turning from the cowering, shuddering pair, who had almost hid themselves beneath the table, he tore a letter out of his bosom, and flung it down before his father.

'Read that, thou hard old man, that didst imprison thy son, read and see what monsters thou hast brought into the world. The memory of my wrongs and hers dwell with you all for ever! I will meet you again at the judgment day; on earth ye will never see me more.'

And in a moment, as he had come, so he was gone, leaving them stiff and cold and white as statues round the smoking feast.

And this was the sight that met Margaret's eyes and Jorian's—pale figures of men and women petrified around the untasted food.

Margaret glanced round, and gasped out, 'Oh, joy! all here; no blood hath been shed. Oh you cruel, cruel men! I thank God he hath not slain you.'

At sight of her, Catherine gave a scream; then turned her head away. But Eli, who had just cast his eye over the false letter, and begun to understand it all, seeing the other victim come in at that very moment with her wrongs reflected in her sweet, pale face, started to his feet in a transport of rage, and shouted, 'Stand clear, and let me get at the traitors'. And in a moment he whipped out his sword, and fell upon them.

'Fly!' screamed Margaret. 'Fly!'

They slipped howling under the table, and crawled out the other side. But, ere they could get to the door, the

furious old man ran round and intercepted them. Catherine only screamed and wrung her hands, and blood would certainly have flowed, but Margaret and Jorian seized the fiery Eli's arms, and held them with all their might, whilst the pair got clear of the house; then they let him go; and he went vainly raging after them out into the street.

They were a furlong off, running like hares. He hacked down the board on which their names were written, and brought it indoors, and flung it into the fireplace.

Thus ended the feast in the house of Cornelis and Sybrandt! The supper that had been cursed was thrown away uneaten, and heavy sadness reigned in the house that night.

And what of Clement?

What that sensitive mind and tender conscience, that loving heart and religious soul went through even in a few hours, under a situation so sudden and tremendous, is perhaps beyond the power of words to paint.

Fancy yourself the man; and then put yourself in his place. Were I to write a volume on it, we should have to come to that at last.

After spending the night with a hermit near Rotterdam who was dying, in giving and receiving holy consolations, he set out for Tergou. He went there to confront his old enemy the burgomaster, and by means of that parchment to make him give back to Margaret her lands and rents. Heated and dusty he stopped at the fountain, and there began to eat his black bread and drink of the water. But in the middle of his frugal meal a female servant came running up and begged him to come and see her dying master who wished to confess his sins to a priest. He followed her without a word. She took him to the burgomaster's house. He followed her into the house and up the stairs. And there in bed, propped up by pillows, lay his deadly enemy, looking already like a corpse.

Clement eyed him for a moment from the door, and thought of all—the tower, the wood, the letter. Then he said in a low voice, 'Peace be with you!'

The rich man welcomed him as eagerly as his weak state permitted. He recognized him not. He began to confess his sins. But he said not a word of the stolen land and rents.

'Hast thou forgotten Floris Brandt?' said Clement, stonily.

The rich man reared himself in bed in a pitiable state of terror.

'How knew you that?' said he.

'The Church knows many things,' said Clement, coldly, 'and by many ways that are dark to you. Miserable impenitent, you called her to your side hoping to deceive her.'

Then he so wrought upon the old man with his words, without revealing himself or producing the parchment, that, ere he left, Ghysbrecht promised to make full amends for all his wrongdoing.

Clement went out of the house, and now—as he was quite sure Margaret had her own and was a rich woman—he disappeared.

CHAPTER 38

The Holy Hermit becomes priest of Gouda.

MARGARET now went to live at the shop that was to have belonged to Cornelis and Sybrandt. Eli had given it to her.

Giles came in to see them and heard the story of Gerard's home-coming. Giles had become a great man now. He had been sent for to the court to amuse the prince with his curious body and gymnastic feats. The princess looked upon him as a kind of pet much like a monkey, and Giles was allowed to say and do what he would.

He was delighted at the return of his brother. 'I'll show him,' said he, 'what it is to have a brother at court with a heart to serve a friend, and a head to point the way.'

They were sitting sad, after his departure, when a shuffling of feet was heard at the door, and a colourless, feeble old man was assisted into the room. It was Ghysbrecht.

Two boxes were brought in. He undid them with

unsteady fingers and brought out of one the title-deeds of a property at Tergou. 'This land and these houses belonged to Floris Brandt, and do belong to you of right, his granddaughter,' he said to Margaret. 'These I did take for a debt long since defrayed. These I now restore to their rightful owner with penitent tears. In this other box are three hundred and forty golden angels, being the rent and fines I have received from that land more than Floris Brandt's debt to me. I have kept account, meaning to be just some day; but avarice withheld me. Pray, good people, against temptation; I was not born dishonest, yet you see.'

'Well, to be sure,' cried Catherine. 'And you the burgomaster. You have whipped good store of thieves, too, in your day. You are a rich woman, Margaret. Have you not a word to say?'

'Bid him keep land and gold and give me back my Gerard that he stole from me with his treason,' said Margaret.

'Alas!' said Ghysbrecht; 'would I could. What I can, I have done.'

He called his men, and was lifted into the litter, saying he felt happier for giving back the land he had clung to so long.

Day by day went on, and still no news came of Gerard. Giles came to them in a great state of excitement. The vicar of Gouda was dead, and he had begged the vacant post for Gerard. The princess had gladly given it, for she remembered Gerard when he had come as a handsome youth to the duke's competition on that afternoon when he first loved Margaret. The trouble now was to find Gerard.

In her perplexity Margaret went to the burgomaster. He sent for his servants and dictated letters to the burgomasters in all the towns of Holland. His clerk and Margaret wrote them, and he signed them. 'There,' said he, 'the matter shall be dispatched throughout Holland by trusty couriers; and as far as Basle in Switzerland. Fear not, we will soon have the vicar of Gouda in his village.'

But the days went on, and still no sign of Gerard. Margaret and a friend went to consult the hermit who lived near Rotterdam. The old hermit had died—we

saw how Clement went to him—but another had since occupied his cave.

This cave was partly natural, partly artificial, in a bank of rock overgrown by brambles. There was a rough stone door on hinges, and a little window high up, and two openings, through one of which the people announced their gifts to the hermit, and put questions of all sorts to him.

On the face of the rock this line was cut—‘Happy is he who lives in God and hath fled out of the world’.

Her friend whispered to Margaret, ‘’Tis a far holier hermit than the last; he used to come to the town now and then, but this one never shows his face to mortal man.’

‘And that is holiness!’ said Margaret, and would go no further. No man was holy to her that did not help his fellow creatures.

But Margaret’s friend went and asked about Gerard, telling the hermit his story. She waited long for an answer, and presently came a voice, ‘Pray for the soul of Gerard, the son of Eli.’

‘Let us go home,’ said Margaret faintly when her friend told her.

Wonderful stories were related of the hermit. The birds came to him to be fed. He only came out of his cave by night, and went among the wolves unharmed. Gradually a suspicion arose in Margaret’s mind. She took to going and sitting hidden in the bushes near the cave.

One day she saw the hermit’s hands as he stretched them out through the opening to feed the birds. They were the hands of her lost Gerard!

Yes, the hermit of Gouda was the vicar of Gouda, and knew it not, so absolute was his seclusion.

After his burst of fury Clement had seen clearly. ‘I love Margaret better than the Church,’ he said to himself despairingly. He resolved to conquer this love. The priest must not marry. If he saw Margaret, he would wish to go back to his married life, to cease to be a priest; he would be false to the vows he had sworn. Therefore he planned to retire into solitude, to fast and practise all kinds of austerities.

Yet he had no peace. He tried to crush his heart, to

tame his body. He tore himself with thorns ; he fasted for days together ; he plunged up to the neck in icy water.

'They wandered in the desert and perished by serpents,' said an ancient writer of the Church, of hermits that went into solitude, 'and were seen no more.' And another, at a more recent epoch, wrote, 'They turned to gloomy madness.' These two statements, were they not one ? For the ancient fathers never spoke with regret of the death of the body. No, the hermits so lost were perished souls, and the serpents were diabolical thoughts, the natural brood of solitude.

Poor Clement felt the truth of it all. He had fled from the world but was none the nearer to the peace of God. One night he crept back to his cave worn out with wandering in the wood.

He paused at the door ; it was closed.

'Why, I left it open,' said he ; 'There is no wind. What means it ?'

He entered rapidly.

There was Margaret Brandt !

At first he thought she was an evil spirit. So long had he fought with phantoms of the imagination in his solitude.

They were both choked with emotion, and could not speak for a while.

'Gerard, I am come to take thee to thy pretty vicarage ; thou art vicar of Gouda, thanks to Heaven and thy good brother Giles ; and mother and I have made it so neat for thee, Gerard.'

'What, desert my cell, and go into the world again ? Is it for that thou hast come to me ?' said he, sadly and reproachfully.

Then Margaret reasoned with him patiently and eloquently, as a woman can. She told him of the people of Gouda, how they needed a priest to care for them, of the sin and the suffering to be fought, the lives to be made happy, the hearts to be turned to God. What good was he doing in that cave for any man ? What good was he getting himself ? Were his thoughts purer, higher, holier ? Was he at peace ?

Clement sighed.

As for his vows, would she tempt him to break them ?

'Ah, Gerard,' said she, 'how shallow are the wise, and how little able are you to read me. Were you to offer to humble me so in mine own eyes and yours, either I should spit in your face, Gerard, or I should snatch the first weapon at hand and strike you dead.'

And Margaret's eyes flashed fire, and her nostrils expanded with her emotion; no one who saw her could doubt her sincerity.

'I had not the sense to see that,' said Clement, quietly. And he pondered.

Margaret eyed him in silence and soon recovered her composure.

'Let not you and me dispute,' said she, gently; 'speak of other things. Ask me of your folk.'

And she told him of his father and mother and how they waited for him at Gouda. Little Kate had died, sore-grieving that she saw not Gerard. And he was near by, all the time!

This broke down Clement; he wept and went with her to the priest's house, or manse, at Gouda, very slowly, for he was weak with much fasting.

And there Clement met his mother. She uttered a cry such as only a mother can. 'Ah! my darling, my darling!' And clung sobbing round his neck. And after a little while Margaret came in, with wet eyes and cheeks, and a holy calm of affection settled by degrees on these sore troubled ones. And they sat, the three together, hand in hand, murmuring sweet and loving words; and he who sat in the middle drank right and left their true affection and their humble but genuine wisdom. He was forced by them to eat a good meal, and at daybreak to go to a snowy bed, and by and by awoke, as from a hideous dream, friar and hermit no more, Clement no more, but Gerard priest of Gouda.

CHAPTER 39

Peaceful days at Gouda for the old lovers.

MARGARET went back to Rotterdam and went not often to the manse¹ at Gouda at first. She remembered Gerard's words when he was yet a hermit.

Sybrandt had fallen off a roof in a bout of drunkenness and was now a cripple. Gerard, all forgiveness, sent for him, and he lived in the manse till he died. Gerard himself, loving the people of his parish, and beloved by them, was occupied from morn till night in good works, and recovered the natural cheerfulness of his disposition. He was the greatest peacemaker that ever was born. He reconciled more enemies in ten years than his predecessors had done in three hundred; one of his ways was to make the quarrellers laugh at the cause of quarrel. He was a wonderful tamer of animals, squirrels, hares, and deer. So, half in jest, a man who had a mule with whom he could do nothing gave it to Gerard, and said, 'Tame this vagabond if you can.' In about six months Gerard had not only tamed Jack, as he called the mule, but won his affections to such a degree, that Jack would come running to his whistle like a dog. One day two farmers had a dispute as to whose hay was the best. Failing to convince each other, they said, 'We'll ask the priest.'

'How lucky you thought of me!' said Gerard. 'Why, I have one staying with me who is the best judge of hay in Holland. Bring me a double handful apiece.'

So when they came, he had them into his room, and put each bundle on a chair. Then he whistled, and in walked Jack.

The farmers were astonished.

'Jack,' said the parson, 'just tell us which is the best hay of these two.'

Jack sniffed them both, and made his choice directly; proving his sincerity by eating every morsel. The farmers slapped their thighs, and scratched their heads. 'To think of us not thinking of that,' they cried, and each sent Jack a big bundle of hay.

¹ The house of a priest, a vicarage.

Gerard now saw that Margaret was unhappy. Neither wife nor widow, she had little to occupy her mind, and that made her discontented. He therefore asked her to come among his folk, to take the alms he set aside for the poor and give it them and hear their sorrows. 'But for your wisdom,' he told her, 'I had died a maniac in yonder cave, and never seen Gouda manse nor pious peace. Will you profit in turn by what little wisdom I have to soften the lot of her to whom I owe all?'

Margaret assented warmly; and a happy thing it was for the little district assigned to her; it was as if an angel had descended on them. Her fingers were never tired of knitting, or working for them, her heart of sympathizing with them. And she regained her peace of mind.

Then Gerard set to work to build almshouses for decayed true men in their old age, close to the manse, that he might keep and feed them, as well as lodge them. His money being gone, he begged for bricks and turned builder, and set up the houses himself.

When the first was finished, the question was who should be put in it. An old friend arrived to settle the question.

As Gerard was passing an inn in Rotterdam one day, he heard a well-known voice. He looked up, and there was Denys; but sadly changed. His beard was stained with grey, and his clothes worn and ragged; instead of his cross-bow he carried a staff. He had been to the wars of Edward the Fourth in England and was giving an account to the company of his adventures.

Gerard listened, his eyes glittering with affection and fun. 'And now,' said Denys, 'after all these feats, here am I lamed for life; by what? by the kick of a horse, and this night I know not where I shall lay my tired bones. I had a comrade once in these parts, that would not have let me lie far from him. But he turned priest and deserted his sweetheart; so 'tis not likely he would remember his comrade.'

'What words are these?' said Gerard, with a great gulp in his throat. 'Who grudges a brave soldier supper and bed? Come home with me.'

'Much obliged;' said Denys; 'but I am no lover of priests.'

'Nor I of soldiers; but what is supper and bed between two true men?'

'Not much to you ; but something to me. I will come.'

'In one hour,' said Gerard, and went in high spirits to Margaret and told her of the treat in store, and that she must come and share it. She must drive his mother in his little carriage up to the manse with all speed, and make ready an excellent supper.

Then he himself borrowed a cart, and drove Denys up, and was very near revealing himself to him on the way when Denys said to him, 'The great use our stout hearts, and arms, and lives till we are worn out, and then fling us away like broken tools.'

They arrived at the new little house that Gerard had built. All was clean, and there was a blazing fire and supper set ready.

Denys brightened up. 'Is this your house, reverend sir ?'

'Well, 'tis my work, and with these hands ; but 'tis your house.'

'Ah, no such luck,' said Denys, with a sigh.

'But I say yes,' shouted Gerard, 'and what is more, I say "Courage, comrade, the devil is dead !"'

Denys started ; 'Why, what ?' he stammered, 'who are you that bring me back the merry words and merry days of my youth ?'

'My poor Denys, I am one whose face is changed, but naught else ; to my heart, dear trusty comrade, to my heart !' And he opened his arms, with the tears in his eyes.

They all supped together merrily, and Denys lived on in the little house at peace, and hobbled about cheering up every one with his old watchword. Several years passed in this happiness. And then a great sorrow fell on Gerard. Margaret caught the plague in Rotterdam and died there. He was with her at the last and heard her parting words, and performed the funeral rites himself in Gouda churchyard. Then he collapsed.

'Ah, Jorian ! good Jorian !' said he, as the latter supported him into the house after the ceremony, 'something snapped within me ; I felt it, and I heard it : here, Jorian, here,' and he put his hand to his breast.

CHAPTER 40

Gerard follows Margaret. Conclusion.

A FORTNIGHT after this a pale bowed figure entered the Dominican convent near Gouda. The sick man was Gerard, who came there to die in peace. He could not bear to be in his manse ; it was too full of memories of Margaret. Brother Anselm was with him, and by chance, the new prior, just appointed, was Jerome. So they met again. 'I would give ten years of my life to save yours,' said Jerome, but Gerard answered him :

'He in Whose hands are the issues of life and death gave me the great summons ; some cord of life snapped in me, and I heard it. He is very pitiful ; I should have lived unhappy, but He said, "No, enough is done, enough is suffered ; poor, feeble, loving servant, thy shortcomings are forgiven, thy sorrows touch their end ; come thou to thy rest !"'

The monks who watched by his bed said (but it might have been fancy) that just before dawn there came three light taps against the wall, one after another, very slow ; and the dying man heard them, and said, 'I come, love, I come.'

This much is certain that Gerard did utter these words, and prepare for his departure, having uttered them.

A few hours later they strewed ashes upon the floor in the form of a great cross, at his request, and laid Gerard upon them, and so he died.

As they made his body ready for burial, the monks found beneath his shirt a long thick tress of fair hair. They started and were horrified, and a noise of voices arose, some condemning, some excusing. But at his funeral Jerome addressed the monks ; 'We have this day laid a saint in earth. The convent will keep his festival ; for our good brother is freed from the burden of the flesh ; his labours are over. And you, young monks, be not curious to inquire whether a lock he bore on his bosom was a token of pure affection, or the relic of a saint ; but remember the heart he bore beneath. Most of all, fix your eyes upon

his life and ways, and follow them if you may ; for he was a holy man.'

Thus after life's fitful fever those true lovers were at peace ; and now a man of another age and nation, touched with their fate, has laboured to build their tombstone, and rescue them from long and unmerited oblivion.

He asks for them your sympathy, but not your pity. No, put this story to a wholesome use.

Let the barrier, that kept these true lovers apart, prepare you for this, that here on earth there will nearly always be some obstacle or other to your perfect happiness, and grieve not that these, the gentle, the loving, and the true died young, for in every age earth's sweetest flowers soonest wither. So seems it good to the Master of life and death, Who is kinder as well as wiser than we are.

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